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THE

L I F E

OF

MR. THOMAS FIRMIN.

PRICE TWO SHILLINGS BOUND.



THE
L I F E
O F
MR. THOMAS FIRMIN,
CITIZEN OF LONDON.

B Y
JOSEPH CORNISH,
Pastor to the Church of Protestant Dissenters at
Colyton, in the County of
DEVON.

The memory of the just is blessed. Prov. x. 7.

He was a man, take him for all in all,
We shall not look upon his like again. *Shakespeare.*

L O N D O N:
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T O

A GENTLEMAN,

W H O,

FROM EXTREME MODESTY,

WILL NOT PERMIT THE MENTION OF HIS

N A M E;

WITH WHOSE ZEAL FOR THE CAUSE OF LIBERTY,

WITH WHOSE REGARD TO THE INTEREST OF RELIGION,

WITH WHOSE DELIGHT IN DOING GOOD,

THE AUTHOR OF THIS WORK IS WELL ACQUAINTED,

AND OF WHOSE BENEVOLENCE,

AND THAT OF SOME OF HIS NEAREST CONNECTIONS,

THE AUTHOR HATH ALSO HIMSELF LARGELY EXPERIENCED;

THIS ATTEMPT

TO DO SOME SMALL JUSTICE TO THE MEMORY

OF ONE OF THE BEST OF MEN

IS MOST RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,

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P R E F A C E.

NOTHING can be more worthy of a rational creature, than to endeavour, by every mean in his power, to promote the knowledge and practice of virtue. This is the professed aim of the moralist and the divine; and unless the philosopher and historian keep this end in view, their speculations and researches, though they may gratify the curiosity natural to the human mind, fail in that which is of much greater consequence;—the impressing upon it a sense of its true dignity, and exciting in the breast a desire of being and of doing good.

The study of history is very pleasing to the generality, and may be made the vehicle of conveying much of that useful knowledge which renders the heart

better. Biography is a species of history which gives a writer some peculiar advantages, who would teach men to be good by examples. The historian must attend principally to great events, which affect mankind only at large. But the biographer may enter into the walks of private life, and exhibit characters interesting to us as individuals. An acquaintance with history may enable a man to shine in conversation; but a knowledge of biography will tend more to improve the heart. Now, to render biography pleasing, there ought to be both variety and dignity in the actions of the person whose life is recorded; without variety the reader cannot be pleased, and unless there be dignity he will be disgusted. My ideas of dignity are not, however, confined to such actions, as obtain the applause of the unthinking part of mankind. In my opinion, that man acts with true dignity, who performs all the kind and beneficent offices for his fellow creatures which he possibly can, and exerts himself to the very utmost in doing good. Many such characters have existed, and, I hope, do still exist; but few, I believe, if any, will be found to equal him
whose

whose life is contained in these sheets, and well deserves to be made known, as exhibiting a pattern fit to be proposed for general imitation.

Accounts of kings and conquerors are not very interesting to the bulk of mankind. Very few are likely to be in situations, which may call for the exercise of the caution to be learned from their errors, or to imitate those actions which rendered them illustrious. From such accounts, however, many useful lessons may be drawn, and that very important one amongst others, the duty of contentment in a lower station. Those who are a little conversant with history, will learn that dignity and power, however justly acquired, are constantly attended with numberless cares; and if injustice and tyranny, or artifice and fraud have been used to obtain them, every friend to virtue abhors or despises the hero and the prince, and learns to be happy in obscurity, and to rest satisfied though confined to the humbler duties of private and domestic life. To read of men who have distinguished themselves by their genius, their learning, and their application is very pleasing; and when these

talents have been employed in the service of mankind, and doing good appears to have been more their desire than the acquisition of fame, the honest and upright of every degree both love and reverence their names and memories. But to that, which, in an historical view, is their chief ornament few can aspire.

Mr. Firmin's excellencies, though of the most exalted kind, were yet such as all may imitate. It was not by the help of extraordinary knowledge in any art or science, that he attracted high esteem from so many of his contemporaries of great note and eminence; he gained honourable fame by a diligent application to business, a prevailing inclination to do good, and a serious attention to the precepts of our holy religion. His soul was cast in a fine mould, and ever influenced by the laws and by the example of Jesus; all the worthy dispositions of his mind rose to the highest degree of improvement, and in him we may see to what dignity and honour a tradesman can attain, without being ever elevated above that rank.

The principal source of my information, with respect to the particulars I have related, has been a former life of
this

this worthy man, intituled *The Life of Mr. Thomas Firmin, late Citizen of London.* written by one of his most intimate acquaintance. The same was published in 1698, which was within a year after Mr. Firmin's death. Intimate acquaintance are oftentimes partial, but there is not the least reason to doubt the truth of the leading actions of Mr. Firmin's life, since they were of public notoriety, are confirmed by contemporary historians, by authentic records, and have been again and again related in various biographical works of the highest repute and authority. The original life has been long out of print and is become scarce, those who have seen it will, unless I am deceived, think with me, that Mr. Firmin's public spirited and beneficent actions may be related in a more regular, perspicuous and striking manner, than is done in the account given of them by his friend. I am at the same time fully convinced, that my attempt falls very short of doing justice to the subject: but until a better history of Mr. Firmin's life be published, I hope that this, however imperfect, will not be entirely useless, as it may be a means of bringing some few at least into an acquaintance with a character.

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rafter which deserves to be universally known.

If the short histories which are here given of some eminent persons should appear, to any readers, not sufficiently connected with the principal design of this work, yet I hope such will not be severe in their censures. None are mentioned but those with whom Mr. Firmin was particularly connected, and as his forming these connections redounded not a little to his honour, I thought a few particulars concerning them, however well known to the learned, might be agreeable to those whose improvement I had principally in view when compiling this work. My own taste may perhaps have misled my judgment, for nothing is so pleasing to me in works of any kind as anecdotes relating to persons of distinguished merit. I have likewise the authority of Dr. Birch on my side, whose life of Archbishop Tillotson, which hath been very well received by the public, is remarkable for the notice therein taken of the Archbishop's friends. I have been also pretty free in making remarks and observations on the various incidents which I thought worthy to be recorded. Some
choose

choose to throw remarks of this kind into notes, which I believe causes them to be oftentimes overlooked. Others choose to intersperse them with the history itself, which in my judgment is the method most likely to impress, upon the minds of readers, those sentiments which an author should wish to convey. I am most concerned least they should be thought too numerous, or not sufficiently pertinent. Not that this is my opinion of them, if so, it would have been folly to have published them to the world; but I well know how partial a man is to his own sentiments, and his own method of writing, and therefore I should submit my judgment to that of the Public; and endeavour, as far as my knowledge and ability extended, to consult the general taste, as to the method of conveying my ideas. To please all is indeed impossible; my highest expectations will be answered, if the candid and judicious should regard this attempt as in some degree worthy of their encouragement and recommendation.

Some, perhaps, may imagine that an attachment to Mr. Firmin's peculiar religious sentiments, and a desire of promoting

moting a regard to them in others, might be a principal inducement with me to republish his life. Such will be mistaken, for the opinions with respect to our blessed Saviour, which Mr. Firmin espoused and maintained, were different from those which I have adopted and still adhere to. I am, however, very free to acknowledge, that the sincere and ardent love of truth, which appeared to reign in his breast, hath greatly increased my veneration for him, and it would be well if all would seek after truth with that diligence which he did, for whatever might be the result of their inquiries, the principle by which they were actuated would be a noble one.

I could have quoted many more authorities in support of the facts which are related, but I thought it unnecessary, since those produced are quite sufficient to establish the truth of them; and it would be useless to refer to several authors, for the proof of that against which no one will object. Whatever faults there may be in the composition, the reader may be assured that the utmost fidelity has been used in the narration, nor indeed have I been under the least
temp-

temptation to set off the hero of my work with borrowed ornaments. To make Mr. Firmin's character the object of general admiration, it needs only to be placed in its true light. This I have endeavoured to do, and though my attempt may incur censure, yet it will afford me no little consolation, if my private studies are rendered in the smallest degree subservient to the interests of virtue and religion.

I should be guilty of an unpardonable omission, if I did not acknowledge my obligations, to the Rev. Dr. Kippis of London, and the Rev. Mr. Bretland of Exeter, whose very friendly remarks and observations have contributed much towards the improvement of my work. The faults which remain, are not to be imputed to either of these Gentlemen; but had it not been for their advice and assistance, the critical reader would have met with many more. As to the sentiments of whatever kind, which I have advanced, my worthy and honoured friends are by no means to be thought answerable for them: they are both possessed of an amiable candour of mind, which disposes them to serve any one
sincerely

sincerely intent on benefiting the public, whether all his ideas with respect to subjects of debate are consonant to theirs or not. Dr. Kippis, who is excelled by no one in the knowledge of biography, encouraged me much to draw up this Life of Mr. Firmin, by declaring it to be his opinion that such a publication might be very useful; adding, that he thought *Mr. Firmin to have been one of the best men that ever lived.*

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Author lives at such a distance from London, that he could not undertake to correct the errors of the press, and therefore hopes that the reader will not impute any mistakes of this kind, if any such there be, to negligence or inattention in him.

THE
L I F E

OF

MR. THOMAS FIRMIN.

C H A P. I.

Mr. Firmin's Birth and Parentage. His Behaviour in his Apprenticeship. He marries, and lives in a very hospitable Manner. Brief Accounts concerning some of the most noted amongst his Acquaintance.

MR. THOMAS FIRMIN was born at Ipswich (a very large and populous town in the county of Suffolk), in the month of June, 1632. His parents, Henry and Prudence Firmin, as they did not abound in wealth, so neither were they in strait or mean circumstances *. They were in that middle station, which con-

* Life, page 5, 6.

tains all that is valuable and desirable in wealth, without the temptations and dangers, to which wealth exposes men. This condition of life many persons of wisdom and experience have thought favourable to virtue above any other. The parents of the worthy man, whose life we are now entering upon, proved, at least in one instance, the justice of this remark; for on account of their sobriety, diligence, and good conduct, the effects of their piety, they were held in great esteem and reputation. They were of the number of those then called Puritans, by the loose and ignorant vulgar, who used to deem affected and precise, such as were more conscientious, devout and exemplary than ordinary, even though professed members of the Church of England.

Mr. Firmin, we may naturally suppose, was carefully instructed by his pious parents in all moral and religious duties; but, as nothing remarkable is recorded of him during the years of his childhood, we must pass on to the time, when being of a proper age he was bound apprentice to a tradesman in London *. His beha-

* Life, page 6, 7.

viour in this situation was diligent and obliging, and he was foremarkably nimble in all his motions, and so quick and ready in taking down, opening goods, &c. that many called him "*the Spirit*."

In making bargains, his words and manner of address were so pleasing and respectful, that after some time the customers chose rather to deal with Thomas, than with the master of the shop; and, when there happened any little dispute about the value of a commodity, he would decide it to the satisfaction of both his master and the customer.

It would be much to the credit and advantage of all apprentices to imitate him in these particulars.

Nothing recommends a youth so much as diligence in his master's business, accompanied with an obliging deportment towards all those who have any dealings with him. Seasons and occasions may also happen, when a young man may find it of the utmost service to have gained the favourable opinion of those with whom he is connected. Mr. Firmin met with one very disagreeable event in the course of his servitude: the elder apprentice took five pounds of his master's

A 2 money,

money, and laid it to young Firmin's charge. Whether the imputation was believed or not the friend who wrote his life was uncertain. "Probably * (says he) it was not." The reasons of this probability are very evident. If a young man be idle, sullen, and neglectful of his master's interest, any ill thing is easily believed concerning him. On the contrary, where there is any room to hope, all are ready to favour one, who recommends himself by those qualities which are proper for his station. However of Mr. Firmin's innocence in this affair no doubt remains.

The elder apprentice was shortly after this transaction seized with a mortal sickness, and before he died made confession, that it was he himself who had taken and spent the money, Mr. Firmin not having been in the least degree privy to it. Thus was his innocence made apparent to all, the consciousness of which, as may be easily supposed, was a most noble support to his own mind, whilst he lay under the charge.

Mr. Firmin, as soon as the term of his apprenticeship expired, began to trade

* Life, page 8.

for himself, setting out with the very small stock of one hundred pounds *. But he was possessed of those qualities, which are generally found to be more serviceable to a man than a large capital. Those qualities were fidelity, industry, and amiable manners, which had recommended him to the love and esteem of all those who dealt with his master, or lived in the neighbourhood. He also stood high in the opinion of the merchants; and, having made a large acquaintance who were attached to his interest, purely on account of his merit, he speedily overcame the difficulties, which usually attend those who enter upon business with very little money of their own. Parents and friends often make themselves very uneasy from an apprehension, that the trifling sums, with which those for whom they are concerned set out in life, will be entirely inadequate to their wants, and prevent them from ever rising much above straits and difficulties. But it frequently happens that this seeming disadvantage, by leading a man to observe the necessity of being diligent, attentive, and obliging,

* Life, page 9.

proves the very means of advancing him; whilst those, who, depending on their own fortunes, neglect the surer methods of thriving, and disappoint the hopes which their relations had been led to form. No stock, how great soever, can render a man successful in trade, without the concurrence of those qualities, which beget confidence and respect. If a youth be of an amiable disposition, and have a turn for business, there is but little cause for anxiety as to his future welfare.

In the year 1660. Mr. Firmin married a citizen's daughter with five hundred pounds as a portion, which though not a large sum, was to him who knew so well how to improve it, a valuable acquisition.

The great expense of supporting a family in this age of dissipation and luxury renders many young traders, and indeed persons of all professions, very averse from matrimony. But it is to be hoped, that, notwithstanding the prevailing love of pleasure, there are still many amongst our fair countrywomen, who are fond of domestic life, and of all those duties which may render it comfortable and agreeable. Such a one, even
without

without a fortune, is a treasure in herself, and will be more likely, upon the whole, to save expenses than to increase them. Young men of warm passions are exposed to temptations, which small degrees of virtue and resolution are not able to withstand ; and, putting religion out of the question, none but the unthinking and superficial would recommend the too common method of satisfying the sensual desires. How much the health is endangered thereby all are sensible, and the expenses attending such a course have ruined thousands. Besides, occasional converse with the abandoned part of the female sex, very frequently begets an ill opinion of every woman ; so that those who have been used to the company of prostitutes, lose all relish for the delicate pleasures of virtuous love ; and, if they find it convenient to marry, have seldom that respect and esteem for a wife, which is necessary to render the nuptial state a happy one.

In general, those, who inveigh most warmly against the vanity, inconstancy and frailty of the female sex, have conversed pretty freely with the worst part of them. There are but few cases and

circumstances, in which it will not be the most prudent and economical way of proceeding to marry early in life; but should any thing particular render this inexpedient, the wisest course will be, to win the affections of some chaste and virtuous female, to be attached solely to her as a lover, and, as soon as affairs will permit, to become her husband. Thus will the purity of the mind and the health of the body be preserved, the expenses attending irregular courses be avoided, and a fair prospect of happiness be ever in view as an excitement to application and diligence.

Mr. Firmin, when he became a house-keeper, was discreet and prudent, yet he practised in an eminent degree that good old English virtue hospitality. From his first entrance on business he sought all opportunities of becoming acquainted with persons of learning and worth, whether foreigners or his own countrymen, and more especially with ministers *. He was seldom without some of the last sort at his table, which, though attended with expense, answered, as he thought,

* Life, page 9.

very valuable ends. Their conversation helped to inform and enlarge his mind, and their friendship was of great use to him afterwards, in serving and assisting the poor, which was the delight and pleasure of his life. For having a large acquaintance, he was enabled to procure the powerful interest of some, and the liberal contributions of others, towards forwarding his important and charitable designs.

Mr. Firmin was settled in Lombard Street, in the parish of St. Mary Woolnoth, the ministers of which parish were first Mr. Samuel Jacomb and then Dr. Outram. With these two excellent preachers and learned men, he maintained a close correspondence. Mr. Jacomb was a divine of a free temper and genius, not confining himself to the ancient systems, but inclined to more liberal notions *. He died in the thirtieth year of his age; so that the world had not long the benefit of his labours. Now also it was that Mr. Firmin became intimate with those very celebrated divines: Whichcote, Worthington, Wilkins, and Tillotson.

* See Birch's Life of Tillotson, page 399.

Dr. Benjamin Whichcote was descended from an ancient and reputable family in the county of Salop; he was born in March, 1609, and in 1626 was admitted a student of Emanuel College Cambridge, of which he was elected fellow in 1633, and became a most excellent tutor. Dr. Samuel Collins, Provost of King's College in that University, being ejected by the parliament visitors, Dr. Whichcote was admitted to it in March, 1644. Dr. Collins was pleased to see a man of such learning and virtue succeed him; and Dr. Whichcote, who rather scrupled at first to accept this place, was at length prevailed upon to do it, and made it appear that his view was more to usefulness than wordly profit; for he punctually paid his predecessor half the income *. He preached a lecture for twenty years at Trinity church in Cambridge, using his utmost endeavours to promote a spirit of sober piety, and rational religion †. The happy effects of his pains appeared in the fine talents and excellent performances of so many eminent preachers after the Restoration, most of whom, and

* Biographical Dictionary.

† Tillotson's Sermon on his death.

Tillotson amongst the rest, had received their education at Cambridge, and been formed at least, if not actually brought up, by him. Others have since copied from, and in some respects improved upon these excellent models; so that Dr. Whichcote had the honour of leading the way to that solid, useful, practical way of preaching, which is now adopted by the learned of all parties. In the year 1662, he was chosen minister of St. Anne's Black-Friars, in London, where he continued till the great fire in 1666, when his church was burnt down; but soon after he was presented by the Crown to the vicarage of St. Lawrence Jewry, where he continued in high reputation till his death, which happened in May, 1683, in the 73d year of his age.

Bishop Burnet, amongst other things greatly to his honour, says of him; "That
 " he set young students on considering
 " the Christian Religion, as a doctrine
 " sent from God, both to elevate and
 " sweeten human nature, in which he
 " was a great example as well as a wise
 " and kind instructor. *" Select sermons

* History of his own times, vol. I. p. 186. fol.

of Dr. Whichcote's were published in the year 1698, by the famous Earl of Shaftesbury author of the Characteristics. The Earl wrote an extraordinary preface to them, in which he not only speaks in the highest terms of the Doctor, but appears in the light of a warm friend to genuine Christianity, of the excellent nature and tendency of which he had formed a very high opinion *. It is to be lamented that his Lordship having such sentiments of the Gospel, as he there expresses, should have dropped any thing in his writings to depreciate the New Testament. But when a desire of obtaining literary fame is the ruling passion, writers are strongly inclined to advance what is new, even in opposition to what is useful. To this desire may be ascribed many of those free things, which ingenious men have advanced, and the enemies of religion and virtue have been glad to lay hold of. Those who are possessed of great talents, ought to be much on their guard, when writing on subjects of importance; for even a witticism may injure a good

* The preface is very curious and the whole is inserted in the Biographical Dictionary under the article Whichcote.

cause, and a jest weighs more with most men than solid and learned arguments. Three other volumes of Dr. Whichcote's sermons have been published, and also a collection of religious and moral aphorisms. They do not abound in the ornaments of style; what chiefly recommends them is the excellence of their matter.

Dr. John Worthington, master of Jesus College in Cambridge, and preacher at St. Bennet Fink in London, died in the year 1671 at Hackney, where he had been chosen lecturer the year before. " He
 " was ever regarded in a most amiable
 " light, as a perfect example of unwearied
 " diligence and activity in his profession,
 " and for the general service of mankind;
 " being furnished with a great stock of all
 " excellent learning proper for a divine;
 " pious and grave, without moroseness or
 " affectation, as remarkable for his humi-
 " lity as his knowledge; zealous in his
 " friendships; charitable beyond the pro-
 " portion of his estate; universally inof-
 " fensive, kind and obliging, even to those
 " who differed from him; not passionate
 " or contentious in debates or contro-
 " versies of religion; of eminent zeal for
 " the promotion of learning and piety, and
 " indefatigable

“ indefatigable in collecting, reviewing,
 “ and publishing, the works of Mr. Joseph
 “ Mede, which he did with so much
 “ care, that it would be hard to instance
 “ either in our own nation, or perhaps
 “ any where else, in so vast a work, that
 “ was ever published with more ex-
 “ actness; by which he raised up to him-
 “ self a monument likely to last as long
 “ as learning and religion shall continue
 “ in the world *.”

His attention to that valuable publica-
 tion, and to the duties of his profession,
 besides the correspondence, which he car-
 ried on with the learned, took up so much
 time, as to prevent him from obliging
 the world with much of his own; besides
 a volume of miscellanies published in oc-
 tavo after his death, an excellent cate-
 chism is commonly ascribed to him. This
 was drawn up wholly in the words of
 Scripture, and not in the phrases peculiar
 to any party of Christians; for he was
 (to use Bp. Fowler's expression) “ a great
 “ enemy to man-made divinity.” And
 surely the doctrines and duties of the
 Gospel, cannot be better expressed than in

* Birch's life of Tillotson, page 377.

the words of the inspired writers. The more these are adhered to, the more will peace and holiness prevail. Those have ever been in all ages of the church the most amiable and useful men, who have endeavoured in every thing to conform, as nearly as possible, to the great standard of truth.

Dr. John Wilkins, another of Mr. Firmin's learned friends, was born in 1614, near Daventry in Northamptonshire. His grandfather by the mother's side, was the good Mr. Dod, well known for his sayings, and distinguished likewise by the sufferings * which he patiently endured, for refusing a compliance with the many ceremonies, which Archbishop Laud and others endeavoured, with a popish zeal, to introduce into the Church of England. Dr. Wilkins was such a proficient in classical learning, that, at the age of 13 †, he was entered a student at New College in Oxford. In 1656, he married the sister of Oliver Cromwell, and was preferred to the mastership of Trinity College

* Neal's History of the Puritans.

† Life of Bishop Wilkin's, prefixed to some of his Works, published in Oct. 1708.

in Cambridge by Richard Cromwell in the year 1659, which office he held but for a short time, being ejected upon the Restoration. He was not favourably thought of at the court of Charles II. on account of his connection with the Protector's family; and being also very enlarged as to his religious sentiments, and desirous of uniting all parties together by mutual concessions, his preferment in the church was opposed by Archbishop Sheldon, whose influence was great*. The Duke of Buckingham however so effectually recommended him to the king, that he was advanced to the see of Chester in 1668, which high dignity he enjoyed but a short time, dying of the stone in 1672.

Bishop Wilkins was not only a great divine, but also a very eminent philosopher. He was one of the first members of the Royal Society, and indefatigable in promoting every kind of useful knowledge. All his writings were ingenious and learned, and many of them very curious and entertaining; and he stands amongst the foremost of those, from

* Burnet's History of his Own Times, vol. I. p. 253.
whose

whose studies the world has received immense benefit. The learned of all professions loved him; and, what is more, the greatest and best qualities are ascribed to him, by so many eminent and good men, that he will be one of the illustrious few, whom the most distant times and ages will revere *.

Dr. Tillotson, that great and amiable divine, at the time of Mr. Firmin's first acquaintance with him, preached the Tuesday lecture at St. Lawrence Jewry, then so much frequented by all the divines of the town, and by a great many persons of quality and distinction. When obliged to be out of London, as he frequently was, either on business or for relaxation or health, he generally left it to Mr. Firmin to provide preachers for his lecture †; and he fulfilled this trust so well that there was never any complaint on account of Dr. Tillotson's absence, some eminent divine always appearing in his room. Mr. Firmin was very fit to undertake this service, for now there was hardly a clergyman of

* For testimonials in proof of his uncommon worth, see his article in the Biographical Dictionary.

† Mr. Firmin's Life, p. 14.

note; that lived in or frequented London, with whom he was not become acquainted. This circumstance enabled him to render material service to many hopeful young preachers and scholars, the candidates for schools, lectures, curacies, or rectories, for whom he would solicit with as much affection and diligence as other persons are wont to do for relations and children.

See here a tradesman, who understood neither Latin nor Greek, logic or philosophy, honoured with the intimacy and friendship of the most learned and eminent persons of the age, and who notwithstanding differed widely from him in opinion as to religious matters, and were continually attacking his supposed errors of doctrine. But as the clearness of his natural understanding, joined to an uncommon solidity of judgment, enabled him to refute their arguments, at least to his own satisfaction; so his steadiness in maintaining what he believed to be the truth did not lessen their regard for him. This is one proof amongst many others, that the widest differences in religious sentiments will never set good men at variance, if their natural tempers be

be amiable, and they be disposed to allow one another the same liberty of thinking and judging, which each claims for himself. What Mr. Firmin's religious sentiments were, or rather what were his endeavours to propagate them from a conviction of their truth and importance, is a matter worth knowing. But his great and extensive charities claim our first attention, and will create a warm love for him in the breast of very benevolent reader. Such a one no doubt, if a stranger to his character before, now begins to reverence it ; for if a man may be known by the company he keeps, Mr. Firmin must certainly have been a most excellent person.

CHAP.

C H A P. II.

Mr. Firmin becomes a Widower, but soon marries again. His Kindness to his Relations. His useful Services to the Poor. Some Account of Mr. Gouge, whose benevolent Scheme was pursued with great Success by Mr. Firmin. His Humanity to imprisoned Debtors. His Care and Attention to distressed Families.

MR. FIRMIN had been married but a short time, when death deprived him of his wife. She had brought him two children, a son and a daughter, the former of whom lived to man's estate, but died a bachelor about seven years before his father. Biographers have taken notice of what they call a very remarkable circumstance with regard to Mrs. Firmin's death, in which many will think, and perhaps very justly, that there was nothing at all extraordinary. " Mr. " Firmin, it seems, being at Cambridge, " dreamed that he saw his wife breath- " ing her last: whereupon he took horse " early

“ early in the morning for London, and
 “ on the way thither, he met the messenger who was sent to give him notice
 “ of her decease *.” God may, without doubt, in the course of his wise providence, see fit, in dreams and visions of the night, or when men are engaged in their common business, to suggest such thoughts to their minds, as may be a means of doing them real service. But as it does not appear that any wise or good end could be answered by this dream, as his wife was dead before he could possibly come to her assistance, ought it not to be ascribed to those fancies of the brain of which no rational account has been yet given. The laying any stress upon dreams, unless evidently calculated to answer some valuable purpose, only serves to prop up the old rotten cause of superstition, every degree of which may prove a source of uneasiness to some honest and good minds.

Mr. Firmin, having experienced the comforts of the married state, did not remain very long without another partner,

* Life, p. 11. All those who have written Mr. Firmin's life in Dictionaries, &c. have thought fit to retain this trifling anecdote.

but

but as soon as it was decent, paid his addresses to the daughter of a justice of the peace in the county of Essex *. He had with this lady, who possessed all the qualifications of a good wife, a very considerable portion. God was pleased to lend them several children. It may properly be said *lend*, for but one of them lived to man's estate, who was named Giles. His father gave him the whole portion which his mother had brought, and he was likely to become a respectable merchant, but he died, when just about to embark for Portugal, where his business called for his presence.

Mr. Firmin's first matrimonial connection was dissolved in less than four years: as to the continuance of the second, which commenced in 1664, no particular mention is made in any of the accounts relating to him, and authors have also been silent as to his character in the domestic relations of a father and a husband. That he filled up these important relations in a becoming manner we have sufficient reason to believe from the whole tenor of his conduct, which

* Life, page 26.

was such as to leave no room for the suspicion of negligence in any of the duties incumbent on him. It is more especially very worthy of being observed, that, when he was possessed of but a moderate capital, and his manner of living was attended with considerable expense, neither of these circumstances, nor that of his having an increasing family prevented him from being a most kind brother, uncle and kinsman *.

There are too many of those, whom the world styles good sort of people, whose cares center entirely in themselves, and their very nearest connections; but true generosity enlarges the heart. What St. Paul says to Timothy (as it is well rendered in the margin of our Bibles;) "He that provides not for his own kindred is worse than an infidel †." was religiously attended to by Mr. Firmin. His losses by some of his relations, for whom he had advanced money, and his disbursements for others amounted to very considerable sums, and most of those losses happened to him just after his entering upon business. But he was disposed to

* Life, p. 12. † 1 Tim. v. 8.

improve the present hour, and not to defer all his acts of kindness and liberality till he had an abundance. He always kept his heart open, and never appears to have formed a design of amassing any particular sum, the aiming at which has been a means of contracting and hardening the hearts of numbers. All should accustom themselves, according to their ability, to do liberal and kind things frequently, and then in all probability their benevolent dispositions will increase with their riches. This was Mr. Firmin's method, and though his knowledge of and diligence in business, would soon have acquired him a very large fortune, yet, when he arrived to the 44th year of his age*, he was worth only about nine thousand pounds, which was more by half than he left behind him at his decease†, though he might have increased his wealth daily. But so far was avarice from growing upon him with years, that he became more and more indifferent to the world the longer he lived in it; though he had always that commendable degree of prudence, which

* Life, p. 28. † Life, p. 38.

rendered him so far attentive to his own interest, as not only to keep himself out of all difficulties, but to be enabled also to be doing good to the very last.

The year 1665 is remarkable in the English annals for a great plague, of which there died in London only, though perhaps not more than half so populous as at present, one hundred thousand persons *. Most of the wealthy citizens removed themselves and their families into the country, and so did Mr. Firmin, but he left a kinsman in his house (since it was necessary that some one should be there) with orders to relieve certain of the poor weekly, and to give them out stuff to employ them in making their usual commodities. He foresaw that he should be hard put to it to dispose of the large quantities, which those poor people would work off in so long a time for him only; but he trusted to the providence of the Father of mercies, who we may be sure, observed with pleasure and approbation such an instance of compassion and tendernefs. His expectations of being some how or other assisted in the disposal

* See all the Histories of that Time.

of this great stock were not disappointed. On his return to London, a wealthy chapman, who was much pleased with this useful and adventurous charity, made an extraordinary purchase of these goods, and by that means Mr. Firmin avoided any loss by then employing the poor *.

The plague was followed, the next year, by that dreadful fire, which laid almost the whole city of London in ashes, the churches and public buildings, as well as the habitations of the poor and the rich being involved in one common ruin. Mr. Firmin's house in Lombard Street was burned in that great conflagration, but he immediately took another, with a warehouse belonging to it, in Leaden-Hall-Street. In this he was fortunate above many others, since few could be accommodated with houses, the fire having spared but a comparatively small number, which had been occupied before this distressing event happened. Most persons were therefore obliged to confine themselves to strait lodgings, and lose the benefit of their trades, till the

* Life, page 27.

immense heaps of rubbish were cleared away, and new buildings raised in the places of the old.

Mr. Firmin was now become a person of note, his noble spirit and generous way of trading having greatly recommended him ; and in a few years he so improved his stock, as to be able to rebuild his own house, and almost the whole of the court in which he lived. As soon as he had performed this duty to himself and his family, he began to build for the benefit of the poor ; for whose service he erected a warehouse near the banks of the river Thames*. In this, corn and coals were laid up, to be sold in dear seasons at a moderate price, that was never to exceed their first cost, unless the stores were any way damaged by keeping ; in that case, the loss was to be made up by selling the rest at a higher rate. This was a very useful charity, and of much service to the objects of it, since it prevented them from feeling the inconveniences of dearth, which must ever be attended with want, when families are large, and the wages only sufficient

* Life, page 28.

for a bare support at cheaper times. Besides being at the trouble of attending to this business, which was not small, it does not appear that Mr. Firmin made any account of the expense he had been at in building, or of the interest of his money which at that time was considerable, 8 per cent. being common, and even 10 being to be had on reasonable security.

Mr. Firmin very wisely judged that no charity could be so serviceable to the poor, as that which kept them out of idleness, and therefore in the year 1676, (at which time it was that his capital amounted to about nine thousand pounds) he did the most eminent service both to them and the public, by erecting a warehouse in Little-Britain near Smithfield, for the employment of the needy and industrious in the linen manufacture*. Dr. Tillotson mentioned this design with great approbation in his funeral sermon for Mr. Gouge, preached in 1681, which sermon is preserved amongst the other works of that celebrated prelate.

* Life, page 29.

“ He (Mr. Gouge) set the poor of
 “ St. Sepulchre’s parish, of which he was
 “ minister, to work at his own charge.
 “ He bought flax and hemp for them to
 “ spin; when spun, he paid them for their
 “ work, and caused it to be wrought into
 “ cloth, which he sold as he could, him-
 “ self bearing the whole loss. This was a
 “ very wise and well chosen way of cha-
 “ rity, and in the good effects of it a much
 “ greater charity than if he had given
 “ to those very persons freely, and for
 “ nothing, so much as he made them
 “ earn by their work: because by this
 “ means he rescued them from two most
 “ dangerous temptations, idleness and
 “ poverty.

“ This course so happily devised and
 “ begun by Mr. Gouge, gave, it may be,
 “ the first hint to that useful and worthy
 “ citizen Mr. Thomas Firmin, of a much
 “ larger design, which has been managed
 “ by him some years in this city with
 “ that vigour and good success, that
 “ many hundreds of poor children and
 “ others who lived idle before, unpro-
 “ fitable both to themselves and the
 “ public, now maintain themselves, and
 “ are also some advantage to the commu-
 “ nity.

" nity. By the assistance and charity of
 " many excellent and well disposed
 " persons, Mr. Firmin is enabled to bear
 " the unavoidable loss and charge of so
 " vast an undertaking; and by his own
 " forward inclination to charity, and un-
 " wearied diligence and activity, is fitted
 " to sustain and go through the incre-
 " dible pains of it."

Mr. Gouge was a man most eminent
 for piety and usefulness, and in the tem-
 per and disposition of his mind greatly
 resembled Mr. Firmin, who highly es-
 teemed him, and prevailed on him to
 live at his house *. Never did one house
 contain two persons of such different
 ages and professions, whose souls were
 more nearly allied. Both their hearts
 were warmed with benevolence and
 love, and their mutual friendship could
 not fail of cherishing those divine prin-
 ciples. Mr. Firmin, being the youngest
 by almost thirty years, must have derived
 great benefit from such a connection; and
 his activity and zeal undoubtedly afforded
 the highest satisfaction to Mr. Gouge,
 who could with pleasure devise methods

* Life, page 49.

of doing good, when he found another so ready to execute them. All that one man could do, he himself did; and, to his unspeakable pleasure, he met with another ready to adopt, and pursue every charitable scheme, which he, whose whole attention was directed to the service of his fellow creatures, could point out. To recount all his benevolent labours would require a volume; but a brief memorial may serve to give us some ideas of his excellencies, whom Mr. Firmin most gladly chose to be a fellow inhabitant of his mansion.

Mr. Gouge was born in the year 1604, at Bow in Middlesex, and received his school education at Eton, and his university learning at Oxford. He left the university and his fellowship, for the living of Collden in Surry, where he had not been long, before he was removed to the large and populous parish of St. Sepulchre's in London; of which he was, for twenty-four years, a most diligent and faithful minister. He was unwearied in the laborious duties of constant preaching, visiting the sick, and catechizing in the church all who would come. To encourage the poor (who were generally

the most ignorant) to seek for instruction, he distributed money amongst them once a-week, changing the day that they might be obliged constantly to attend. As for the poor who were able to get their own living, he set them to work, buying flax and hemp for them to spin, which when manufactured he sold as he could amongst his friends.

The Bartholomew act obliged him to quit his living in 1662 *; for he was dissatisfied with the terms of conformity then imposed. This was a great loss to his parish and also to himself, as the living was a very valuable one; but as he had then a good estate, his charity to the poor was continued. He made it the great business of his life to serve them, and applied himself to it with as much constancy and diligence, as other men do to their trades. He suffered much by the fire of London, and this, together with settling his children, reduced his income to one hundred and fifty pounds yearly. Of this he always spent one hundred in works of charity, urging others to assist him in his benevolent designs, though it

* Nonconformist's Memorial, last edition, p. 144.
does

does not appear, that he persuaded any to do so largely as himself.

Besides employing the poor, he was much set on instructing them in religion, well knowing from his own experience, that piety is the foundation on which all other virtues must be built. And in that he judged rightly. For certainly those are most likely to submit to the evils of life with patience, and to fulfil the duties of it amidst temptations and snares, who have a firm faith in, and a good hope towards God, as the bountiful and powerful rewarder of all those who diligently seek his favour, by yielding a willing obedience to his commands. To promote these valuable ends, he freely gave to the poor such books as *The Whole Duty of Man*, *The Practice of Piety*, and others of the like kind, containing such things only as good christians are agreed in, and not matters of doubtful disputation. These he caused to be printed in Welch, and his spirit was so far from partaking of narrowness or bigotry, that he procured the *Church Catechism* with a practical exposition of it, and also the *Common Prayer* to be printed likewise in that language, and given to such as

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would

would otherwise have been unable to get them. It has however been insinuated, that his charities in Wales, were designed only to serve a party, and that the dissenters have increased in consequence of them *. If this be the case, it must be purely owing to the increase of piety, for Mr. Gouge never gave the people a single book, nor can be charged with having used a single argument to persuade them to nonconformity. Indeed no one can wonder, who considers by what wretched and despicable hirelings the Welch churches are frequently served, that teachers of any denomination, who appear to have some degree of zeal and seriousness, should be attended to and followed. Until the established clergy of that principality pay more regard to their duty, than has hitherto been customary amongst them †, all those, whose views are superior to the interests of any particular party, will rejoice that there are preachers of any persuasion, labouring to instruct a neglected people in the principles of our common christianity, and

* Mr. Wynne's edition of Powell's History of Wales.

† See View of the State of Religion in the diocese of St. David's, written by D. D. of that principality.

ardently

ardently join in the wishing that another Mr. Gouge may arise and help them.

In the latter part of his life, he confined his services chiefly to that country, where he thought they were most wanted. Besides distributing books, having obtained a licence from some of the bishops to preach in Wales, he took an annual journey thither, and when more than sixty years of age, used to travel about, distributing his charities, instructing the ignorant, and settling schools in the chief towns, to the number of three or four hundred; where women were employed to teach children to read, and books provided for them gratis, or sold at a small price. He used often to say with pleasure, "that he had two livings " which he would not exchange for the " greatest in England; viz Christ's Hospital, where he used frequently to catechize the poor children, and Wales, " where he went sometimes twice in a " year to spread knowledge, piety, and " charity." He was ever ready to embrace and oblige all men, and if they did but fear God and work righteousness, he heartily loved them, how different soever from him in judgment about things less necessary,

necessary, and even in opinions that he held very dear. But neither his excellent temper, nor the eminent service he was continually doing could preserve him in perfect tranquillity. He was persecuted to such a degree even in Wales, as to be excommunicated for preaching occasionally, notwithstanding he had a licence, and went constantly to the parish churches, and to the Lord's supper when administered in them. Yet this wicked opposition did not dishearten him. He still went about doing good, and was spared for the benefit of mankind till October 1681, when he made a peaceful and happy end, dying suddenly in his sleep, being then seventy-seven years old.

Dr. Tillotson honoured him with a funeral sermon, in which most of the abovementioned particulars are recorded; and he spoke of his excellencies in that warm style of approbation, which became a truly Christian Divine. Indeed he had a fine subject for panegyric; Mr. Gouge being a man in whom none but zealots could find matter for censure; nor had such, says Mr. Baxter, any thing to allege against him, but his "not conforming entirely to their impositions."

In

In some of Mr. Gouge's useful charities, Mr. Firmin assisted him, especially in printing his edition of the Welch Bible, which was a very expensive undertaking. To this good work, Dr. Tillotson contributed no less than fifty pounds *. Mr. Firmin also adopted Mr. Gouge's useful plan, for relieving want, and at the same time encouraging industry. Of his endeavours in this way, he thus speaks in a book which he wrote, intitled, *Proposals for the Employment of the Poor*.

" It is now about four years since I
 " set up my workhouse in Little-Britain,
 " for the employment of the poor in the
 " linen manufacture, which hath afford-
 " ed so great help and relief to many
 " hundreds of poor families; that I never
 " did, and fear I never shall do an action
 " more to my own satisfaction, or to the
 " good and benefit of the poor."

The late reverend and ingenious Mr. Harte, in his essays on husbandry; page 156, recommends this scarce and valuable treatise of Mr. Firmin's to all the lovers of national œconomy. It contains (as Mr. Harte

* Life, page 50.

thinks) many useful hints and observations deserving of attention; and in some things his plan hath been followed. The public, as Mr. Harte observes, are particularly indebted to Mr. Firmin, not only for the idea, but the actual introduction of parish workhouses for the more profitable employment of the half-disabled and indigent, or such as are too young or too old for the business of agriculture. Workhouses indeed, owing to bad management are oftentimes wretched habitations; but if properly regulated, would conduce much to the comfort and advantage of the poor. He employed in the manufacture, which he had with so much benevolence and discretion established, sixteen or seventeen hundred spinners at a time, besides dressers of flax, weavers, and others *. The greatest part of these could not earn more than sixpence in a day, though they worked sixteen hours. Provisions were then considerably cheaper than at present, but Mr. Firmin did not think their wages a sufficient recompence for their labour; on which account he was very

* Life, page 31.

liberal to them in his charities, especially at christmas, and in severe weather, and so attentive was he with respect to every thing which might contribute to their convenience and comfort, that observing how much they were soiled by carrying away coals in their aprons, and in the skirts of their coats, he provided canvass bags and gave them, that so there might be no circumstance to lessen the value of his charity.

He was persuaded that nothing conduces more to health than cleanliness, and that to keep persons clean, proper changes of linen were very requisite and necessary; because linen can be frequently washed. The poor spun much of this of a strong coarse sort, and Mr. Firmin, with the assistance of his friends, would sometimes give away fifteen hundred shirts and shifts in a year; so that those had it in their power always to appear somewhat decent, who would take any tolerable care of their woollen garments. They were also encouraged in their labours, by persons of fortune, whom their kind employer would persuade to come, and be eye-witnesses of their poverty and diligence. Such as
were

were disposed to learn the art of spinning had teachers hired for them; and, if any were not able to purchase wheels and reels for spinning, those were bought and freely given to them. Mr. Firmin would often take up poor children as they were begging in the streets, and have them taught at his own charge, providing them with things necessary for setting them to work; but never deducting any part of the cost out of their wages *.

He reckoned himself fortunate, that in one year, in which he had laid out four thousand pounds, two hundred only were lost. This most would think a very considerable sum to be sunk in one mode of charity, to which so much time and pains were also devoted. The loss however must have been greater, had not many persons taken off large quantities of these commodities on purpose to encourage so good a work. The East-India and Guinea companies in particular bought their canvasses of him, for pepper bags, and other coarse merchandize, which before, they were supplied with from

* Life, page 32.

foreign countries. When this trade had been carried on for more than five years, at the expence of a thousand pounds and upwards, Mr. Firmin published a *Book of Proposals* to engage others to set the poor on working at the public charge; or at least to assist him and two or three friends more. But neither the arguments which he offered in this book, nor such as he urged in frequent conversations with the lord mayor, the aldermen and other wealthy citizens, could prevail upon them to concur with his benevolent designs; so that he was obliged to lessen the spinning trade *.

In the year 1682, the whole disbursement was two thousand three hundred and thirty-seven pounds, two hundred and fourteen pounds of which were quite lost. And notwithstanding this charity was of so manifest advantage to the community, yet the loss increased annually, there not being a sufficient number of persons to be found, who would buy the manufactures at the price they cost him. The deficiency upon all the work of the poor, for seven or eight years together,

* Life, page 33.

was no less than twopence upon every shilling ; but Mr. Firmin was content, and used to say “ two pence given them “ by loss in their work, was twice so “ much saved to the Public, in that it “ took them off from beggary or theft*.” But the loss in some years was extraordinary. In the year 1683, though the trade increased a little, his own disbursements and those of his friends, were not less than two thousand pounds, and the loss four hundred. In the year 1684, the balance not then received, amounted to seven hundred and sixty-three pounds ; and in the year 1685, it was increased to nine hundred pounds. To make up for this loss, an eminent citizen, who had five hundred pounds in that stock, quit- ted the whole principal, and required no interest †. In the following years the trade still declined for want of more be- nefactors, till the year 1690, when the design was taken up by the Patentees of the linen manufacture, who agreed with Mr. Firmin to give him one hun- dred pounds per an. to oversee and go- vern it. But this undertaking not an- swering his expectations, or those of the

* Life, page. 34. † *ibid.*

Patentees, he never received the promised salary, which was a loss to the necessitous labourers, to whom he would in all probability have given the whole ; for he never wished to derive any profit to himself from their industry : on the contrary, he lost upwards of five hundred pounds by employing them. Once he drew some prizes in a lottery, to the amount of one hundred and eighty pounds, but he reserved only the money he had risked, and gave away the rest ; a part to some relations, and the remainder to the poor *.

The spinners being thus deserted, Mr. Firmin returned to the care of them again, and managed the trade as before, endeavouring to make it bear its own charges, and supplying the deficiency of their small earnings by larger contributions of charity than usual ; he besides made applications in their behalf to persons of all ranks, with whom he had any intimacy or friendship. He would even carry the cloth to those with whom he had scarcely any acquaintance, telling them “ It was the poors’ cloth, which in conscience they ought to buy at the price for

* Life, page 35.

“ which

“ which it could be afforded.” If the buyers were very wealthy, he would persuade them to give some of what they had purchased towards clothing the labourers; and he took care also to be soon paid for what was sold. Without using such methods, he could not possibly have employed so great a number of people, who always wanted their money immediately on the delivery of their work. This continued to be his chief business and care till the day of his death, saving that, when the calling in of the clipped money occasioned such a scarcity of current coin, that many of the rich had not enough to send their servants with to market, he was forced to dismiss some of his spinners merely through the want of cash to pay them. He continued to take out of the general stock, to the amount of seven hundred pounds, till Mr. James, his partner and kinsman, told him he should take out no more. This was not owing to that gentleman’s disapprobation of the workhouse charity; (on the contrary he encouraged, promoted, and freely lent money to it) but as the whole common trade went through his hands, and was managed by him, he
was

was more sensible than Mr. Firmin, that a larger sum of ready money could not be spared for that use, without doing a material injury to them in other respects *.

Flax and tow being very combustible goods, Mr. Firmin was always a little uneasy, lest by some accident or other the workhouse, which was in the keeping of servants, should take fire, and a squib was once flung by some careless boy into the cellar, where those materials were stored, but providentially did no harm. Concerning the workhouse and the spinners, Mr Firmin would often say, "that to pay the labourers, to relieve them
" with the money begged for them, and
" with coals, garments, &c. was to him
" such a pleasure, as magnificent buildings,
" pleasant walks, well cultivated orchards
" and gardens, the jollity of music and
" wine, or the charms of love or study,
" are to others." In this he said no more than the truth, for it appeared, on carefully examining his accounts, that he might have left a fortune behind him of at least twenty thousand pounds, if he had

* Life, pages 36, 37.

not employed most of his gettings in private and public charities, which so reduced his substance, that he died worth little more than a sixth part of that sum *. How glorious must be his reward, who was thus rich in good works, and continually laying up in store for himself a treasure in heaven ! to this blessed state his views were ever directed ; and as to this world, it was his settled resolution to quit it in very moderate circumstances. He said to a friend but a short time before his decease ; “ were I now worth forty thousand pounds, I should leave behind me but very little of it.” It is even likely that he would have died worth less than he really did ; for, had he come into the possession of any large sum, it would have engaged him in such vast designs for the benefit of the poor, that he would probably have gone beyond the expense at first intended. His physician used to blame him, because he did not allow himself a competent time for his dinner, but hastened away to Garraway’s coffee-house about such affairs as he had taken in hand. These affairs were

* Life, page 38.

feldom or never his own. He was either employed in soliciting for the poor, or doing the business of some friend who wanted his interest, or attending those meetings which were held to consult the public good. It was of vast advantage to him, in the discharge of these many and important concerns, that he was always very expeditious in his dispatches, being quick above most men in apprehending, speaking, judging, resolving, and acting *. This natural fitness for business was greatly improved by a readiness and zeal, which prompted him to the most vigorous exertions, whenever he could be useful. That was a pleasure to him, which to persons of a smaller degree of benevolence would have been a toilsome labour.

Mr. Firmin's known readiness to engage in every undertaking, by which any good might be done, led some well disposed persons to persuade him to set up the woollen manufacture; because at this the poor could earn better wages than at the linen one, which he thought a sufficient inducement to make the trial; and ac-

* Life, page 39.

cordingly he took a house for this purpose in Artillery Lane. But the price of wool advancing very much, and the London spinners, not being at all skilful in drawing a woollen thread, after a considerable loss by them, and twenty-nine months trial he gave over the project *.

Such were the methods which he took to preserve his fellow creatures from distress. He shewed equal humanity and compassion to such as were involved in it. He was particularly zealous and active in redeeming poor debtors out of prison, not only out of regard to their persons, but also to the situation of their unhappy and starving families. By his own liberality, added to his diligence in procuring the charitable assistance of several worthy persons, hundreds of unfortunate creatures obtained their liberty, who were held in durance only for the fees of jailors, or very small debts†. The unrelenting cruelty of some creditors is indeed shocking to humanity. The extravagant and knavish, without doubt, deserve punishment; but to detain

* Life, page. 40.

† *ibid.*

those whom losses or sickness, or want of ability to carry on trade with success has reduced to straits, is a most detestable practice. Did the punishment affect the unhappy debtor alone, it would be exceedingly severe. To be confined within the narrow bounds of a prison, denied the benefit of wholesome air, made a companion of the most abandoned and profligate of mankind; to be excluded from the means of rising into credit, of recovering a lost character, and becoming once more useful to society; all these circumstances render a prison dreadful to one of the least degree of sensibility. But it is impossible to conceive how exquisite must be his distress, who has a fond wife struggling with extreme indigence, and a family of innocent babes weeping for want of their daily bread. When such fall under the iron hand of oppression, what divine pleasure must that man enjoy, whose generous heart disposes him to pity and to raise them up.

Mr. Firmin, besides endeavouring to obtain the discharge of prisoners, took care also for the better and easier subsistence of those whom he could not release. He would examine them concern-

ing the usage they had from their keepers; and he sometimes prosecuted jailors for extorting unlawful fees, and making other unreasonable demands. One jailor dreading the issue of an examination hanged himself. If from time to time some public spirited persons would look into the state of our jails, many shocking abuses might be prevented. To prevent and punish such abuses, a number of benevolent gentlemen formed themselves into a committee in the year 1729, whose praises are recorded in the immortal writings of our amiable poet Thomson *. A bard like him would find a noble subject for praise in Mr. Howard, a gentleman of Bedfordshire, who hath lately been at great expense and trouble to examine personally into the state of the prisons throughout this and the neighbouring kingdoms and states, with no other view but the generous one of alleviating the distresses of the forlorn and miserable. The author of this life, though an entire stranger to Mr. Howard, could not resist the strong inclination

* Winter, line 380—389.

which

which he felt of paying this small tribute of respect to his disinterested goodness.

Mr. Firmin continued to be the friend and reliever of poor debtors, from before the year 1681, to his last breath; and being grieved that he could not in his private capacity, procure the release of those unfortunate persons, the payment of whose debts was beyond the reach of common charity, he vigorously promoted *Acts of Grace*, by which the insolvent might obtain a parliamentary discharge. He himself was never one of the national representatives, yet he had a mighty interest in both houses, and was the cause that many bills were withdrawn and others passed. That he had such great influence was so well known, that once, when an Act of Grace for poor prisoners (which was liable to be, and was actually abused by unconscionable and knavish people) passed both the houses and obtained the Royal assent, he was upbraided with it by some of the creditors, and told it was his *Act* *.

He was not insensible that sometimes people grow poor and get into prisons,

* Life, page 41.

by being negligent, idle, proud, and intemperate ; yet he could not agree with those who had no compassion for such, and who would say, that the extravagant and vicious ought to feel the sad consequences of their own folly. He was wont to answer to such reasonings “ That it “ would be a miserable world indeed, if “ the Divine Providence should act by “ that rule ; if God should shew no “ favour, grant no help or deliverance “ to us, in those straits or calamities that “ are the effect of our own sins. If the “ universal Lord seeks to reclaim and to “ better us by favours and graces, do we “ dare to argue against the example set “ by him, and a method without which “ no man living may ask any thing of “ God * ? ”

These were sentiments worthy of a true christian ! some indeed are so bad, that nothing but severity will restrain them from doing irreparable injury to society, the safety of which every man ought to make the chief object of his attention. Yet to shew mercy and to forgive will be ever amiable, even when it

* Life, page 42.

degenerates into weakness, as it certainly does when it suffers every bad man to go unpunished. No exact rules can be laid down as to the degree in which offenders should be prosecuted: men must be determined by their own judgments and feelings.

Poor of one sort or another there will always be, and the number must be greatly increased in a time of dearth, sickness, or decay of trade; which evils, though they be but temporary, must yet be severely felt by those, who having little or nothing to begin the world with, are broken down by small losses. When such as must live by the labour of their hands, enter into the married state, rigid economists will blame them. Such, charge servants in particular with imprudence, whose wages will do little more than to find them in cloaths, when leaving a good place they take upon them a load of domestic cares. It is however well for society, that the dictates of nature speak louder in some than those of quiet and ease. If none were ever coupled together, but such as have an almost certain prospect of living without want or

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anxiety,

anxiety, the next century would find our part of the world but thinly inhabited.

Mr. Firmin well knew how much those must suffer, who have large families and small means, and for such, during several years of his life, he begged to the amount of five hundred pounds per annum, and distributed amongst them. To render this part of his charity as beneficial as possible, he would inquire of persons the most noted for integrity and liberality, who were the most necessitous and deserving poor in their respective neighbourhoods. When he had been informed who they were, he went to their houses, that he might judge farther, by meagre looks, number of children, mean furniture, and other circumstances, in what degree it might be fit to assist them. He always kept and produced exact and regular accounts of the money intrusted to him, but in time his fidelity became to be so well known, that many of his contributors would not receive them. Sometimes the sums intrusted to him for the service of the poor were so large, that he was enabled to commit a part of it to those, whom he knew to be charitably disposed like himself;

self; and when they had given it to such as appeared to be necessitous, they would return to him an account of their names and cases *.

In these distributions Mr. Firmin sometimes considered others besides the mere poor, particularly the poorer sort of ministers. He used to send, upon occasion, no less than ten pounds to a clergyman in debt, if his difficulties arose from a small income or a large family; taking care first of all to be assured that he was a man of probity and merit. He once asked a friend concerning a clergyman, whose name is not recorded, what sort of a man he was? his friend answered, "That his mind was much
 "above his purse, for he was charitable,
 "ingenious, learned, and a father amongst
 "young scholars who were promising
 "men; but his living not worth above
 "eighty or ninety pounds per annum." Mr. Firmin replied, "I have done much
 "for that man:" and his friend assured him that his liberality had never been better placed. Upon the death of this clergyman, his widow was asked, whic-

* Life, page 43, 44.

ther there had not been some acquaintance, between her husband and Mr Firmin. " She said the acquaintance was " not much, but the friendship great. " Her husband had been acquainted with " many persons of quality, and had experienced their liberality through the " whole course of his life, because his " address as well as his merit was so remarkable. But of his many benefactors, Mr. Firmin had done most for " him both in life and death. When " her husband died, his effects would not " pay his debts, upon which she was advised by a clergyman, to propose a " composition with the creditors, that " seeing every one could not be fully " paid, yet all might receive a part. She " consulted Mr. Firmin upon this, who " approved the advice, and was one of " the first that subscribed the composition, but remitted to her his whole " debt, and endeavoured to procure something from others, in which he did not " succeed according to his wish; but he " himself made her a present of a good " Norwich stuff, that very well clothed " her, and her four children *."

* Life, Page 45 46.

Mr.

Mr. Firmin certainly judged very properly in thinking, that charity should not be confined entirely to the very lowest orders of poor. Such as have lived in reputation and credit, have more wants and finer feelings than those who have been always habituated to poverty, and are deserving of the peculiar attention of the benevolent, whom Providence hath supplied with the means of affording occasional relief, in larger sums than pence and shillings.

“ I do not love (says the celebrated Pope Ganganelli) in one of his entertaining letters (if they be his letters), I do not love bestowing drop by drop, or tying one’s self down to regular alms-giving, so as to have nothing left for an object in extreme want. It is better to rescue one or two families from distress, than to scatter a few pieces at random without completing any purpose. Besides, it would be proper to have always a sum in reserve for extraordinary cases, for by this œconomy you will have a remedy at hand for unforeseen contingencies. Do not give into that wrong notion of

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“ charity:

“ charity which, without considering
“ either birth or extraction, would have
“ all its objects clothed and fed like
“ the meanest of the people. Charity
“ humbles nobody, and should be pro-
“ portioned to circumstances and con-
“ ditions*.”

* Vol. I. Letter 50, to Count * * *.

C H A P. III.

Mr Firmin's Attention to Christ's Church and St. Thomas's Hospitals; to the Irish and French Refugees; and to other Public and Private Charities. Some Account of Bishop Compton.

MR. FIRMIN, during the last twenty-three or twenty-four years of his life, was one of the governors of that noble and useful charity Christ's Church Hospital, to which he was a great friend and benefactor. King Edward VI. that miracle of piety, learning, and discernment, the glory of our nation, and the admiration of all foreigners, was its original founder. He was moved to this benevolent action by a sermon, which Bishop Ridley * preached before him, just as he was about to leave this world; which circumstance did not lessen his concern for the happiness of those who were to remain in it.

* Ridley's Life of Bishop Ridley, page 396, 399.
Christ's

Christ's Church Hospital was allotted for orphans and such as were naturally helpless; and it hath been greatly enlarged and improved, since the time when it was first erected, by the benefactions of several generous and humane persons.

The children are educated in all parts of useful learning; and by this means such as would otherwise be a burden and even a nuisance to the public are qualified for rendering it the greatest services. The girls are about seventy in number, but above a thousand boys are maintained, clothed, and instructed, in writing, drawing, mathematics, the learned languages, and any other branch of knowledge, as their various geniuses may incline them, which is always attended to by the masters, who are men of abilities, and frequently of great eminence in their several professions.

Mr. Firmin procured many and very considerable donations for this hospital, and was unwearied in his endeavours to see the charity of the generous properly applied. The Honourable Sir Robert Clayton, desiring to make provision for a mathematical master, thought fit to propose,

propose, and, and by his interest with some great persons at court, was enabled to procure, the establishment of a mathematical school, for bringing up forty boys, well skilled in the Latin tongue, to a perfect knowledge of the art of navigation. Seven thousand pounds had been given by a citizen of London for this purpose, but the fund, out of which it was paid reverted to the crown at the Restoration. King Charles II. however, was pleased to grant this money, that it might be applied to the purposes for which it was designed. Sir Robert, who had been the chief instrument in procuring it, was highly pleased with his success; and he was resolved to do something likewise at his own expense. Gratitude to God who had raised him from a very dangerous fit of sickness, in which his life was despaired of, led him to think of thus expressing his obligations. Mr. Firmin had the happiness of being very instrumental towards his recovery, by personally attending him, and giving immediate notice to the physicians of several symptoms *.

* Life, page 57.

What Sir Robert determined upon was the building a ward for girls in this hospital, and he committed the management of the affair to Mr. Firmin, who set about it with great alacrity and diligence. At whose charge it was done, was then kept a secret; but when near four thousand pounds had been laid out upon it, and it remained still unfinished, party disputes ran high in the city, and those, who would not declare for the court doctrine of passive obedience (amongst whom were Sir Robert and his faithful friend and agent Mr. Firmin) were put out of all posts of power and authority. Then it was that Mr. Firmin broke silence, and upbraided those excluding governors, for depriving the hospital of so great a benefactor as the builder of that ward*. His arguments, however, were borne down by a great majority of the governing citizens, who, either through stupidity, or fear, or private interest, defended with great zeal that slavish and degrading opinion, so entirely repugnant to common sense, and to the constitution of England.

* Life, page 58.

Mr. Firmin, besides being employed for Sir Robert, was also the agent for another gentleman, who chose to conceal his name, but expended above four hundred and thirty pounds in building a ward for the sick, that being kept apart they might not infect the healthy and sound, if the small pox, or any other contagious distemper, should happen to get in amongst the children, as is often the case. He also received from other persons two thousand, two hundred and forty one pounds, which he took care properly to dispose of and account for. At the charge also of one of his friends, he laid leaden pipes to convey the water to the several offices of the hospital, and and bought a large cistern, which, with the pipes, cost about two hundred pounds. These were great conveniences to the house, and especially to the orphans, who before fetched up the water which they used on their backs; which, as it was too laborious an employment for their tender years, so it likewise made some of the apartments and the clothes of the children dirty; things which ought carefully to be guarded against in all charitable institutions.

Besides

Besides this, he built a school at Hartford for the hospital children, where many of them are still boarded. The school cost five hundred and forty-four pounds, of which he received, by the charity of ten persons, four hundred and eighty-eight pounds: as to the balance of fifty-six pounds, it lay upon himself for any thing that appears to the contrary. It was also entirely at his own expense, that he set up a clock and dial for the use of the hospital, repaired all the walls, and built two brick-houses, to be disposed of to such officers, as the governors of the hospital should see fit *.

It was Mr. Firmin's custom to be present every Lord's Day at five in the evening with the orphans at their public devotions; for at that time prayers were read, and an anthem sung by select voices, in the chorus of which all joined. After this they sat down to supper at the several tables, under the care of their matrons. Here Mr. Firmin observed the behaviour, both of them, their officers and attendants, commending or admonishing as there was occasion. To

* Life, page 58. The above is testified by a certificate under the clerk's hand.

this sight he invited, at different times all his friends, whether of the town or country; and before they went away he would lead them to the orphan's box, to which they contributed as they saw fit. A certain person who came from the country, was so well pleased, after having seen the order and method of the hospital, that, on returning home, he made his will, and gave very considerably to the place. Here it should not be forgotten, that Mr. Firmin very carefully inspected the management of the food provided for the use of the hospital. This is a matter too much neglected by governors of charities, and overseers of the poor, as thousands of our fellow creatures know to their sorrow. He would not suffer any negligence of this sort; and once when the children's suppers were prepared, thinking that one of the portions was too small, he carried it immediately into the kitchen and weighed it himself. It proved, however, to be of full weight, and so the cook escaped the severe reproof, which any want of regularity or due care would have drawn from him*.

* Life, page 60, 61.

St. Thomas's Hospital in Southwark, was another of the pious King Edward's foundations, and intended for the relief of the lame, wounded, and sick. On the care of this Mr. Firmin entered in the year 1693, when Sir Robert Clayton, being then Father of the city of London, was chosen president of the said hospital, which office he thought fit to accept. On taking a view of it, he found that it was sadly gone to ruin. The ground about the lodgings not having been cleared away for a long space of time, was raised so high, that the patients lay as it were in a cellar, in a close confined air, than which nothing could have been more injurious. The roof and the walls also were exceedingly out of repair, and it rained through even upon the beds. It was in vain to think of any thing else than rebuilding, nor could that be delayed without great injury and damage to the materials; for some part prevented the workmen's pulling it down, by falling of itself *.

Sir Robert, knowing the activity and address of his friend Mr. Firmin in all

* Life, page 72.

works of charity, caused him to be chosen one of the governors. He found that the revenues of the hospital were insufficient, either for the purposes of rebuilding or repairing, unless the sick and wounded were denied relief; an expedient which he could not bear to think of, and therefore immediately set himself about procuring subscriptions. The president was pleased to give three hundred pounds, and the governors, several merchants, and other rich traders were very liberal, subscribing from twenty to an hundred pounds each. Without doubt the most of this money would have been contributed, though Mr. Firmin had not been the solicitor for it; yet it was computed by knowing and capable judges, that the subscriptions were greater by a thousand pounds than they would have been, had not he used his powerful interest. The charge being computed, and the money in part raised, materials were also to be provided, and workmen to be consulted and agreed with. Mr. Firmin was constant in attending the committee appointed for that purpose, and the master-builders made their most frequent applications to him,

him, whilst he was very careful to oversee their proceedings *.

One thing troubled the governors very much, which was, that they were obliged to rebuild the church of the parish, in which the hospital stood. The sum necessary for this purpose, being some thousands of pounds, could not be taken out of the revenue of the hospital, without great prejudice both to it and to the patients. It happened that the parliament was then about settling a tax for the finishing St. Paul's Cathedral; and the governors petitioned the house of commons, for some share in that tax towards rebuilding St. Thomas's Church. But because many other parishes prayed for the like assistance at the same time, the house upon a debate in a grand committee, resolved that only St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey should have any such provision allowed them. Mr. Firmin was much grieved at this resolution, but being determined that no method should be left untried, he and another of the governors set themselves, that very night, to draw up several rea-

* Life, page 74.

sons, shewing that St. Thomas's Church, had a claim to some favour in preference to the rest. They used such diligence as to get these reasons published against the next morning, and he and his associate gave copies of them to the members as they entered the house, telling them that they must not expect to have the sick and wounded seamen cured, if they did not pay some attention to their request.

The effect was, that the house took the matter again into consideration, and allowed three thousand pounds to the hospital for the use desired. The obtaining this, caused Mr. Firmin to return home with more pleasure and satisfaction than if an estate of that value had fallen to himself*.

In the year 1680 and 1681, the French Protestants, driven from their own country by the cruel persecutions of Lewis XIV. came in great numbers to England, and made new work for Mr. Firmin's charity and zeal. Of all objects he thought those the most deserving, who chose rather to suffer than to secure

* Life, page 75, 76.

their

their ease by doing violence to the sacred dictates of conscience. Whether the opinions of the sufferers agreed with his own or not, weighed but little with him; sincerity in what they professed was what he thought rendered them deserving the help of every friend to virtue and religion *. Turks and Jews, should they be driven from any country, purely on account of their faithful adherence to that religion, of the truth of which they were fully persuaded, ought to be esteemed and received as persecuted for righteousness' sake.

The sufferings of the French Protestants exceeded all that can be conceived or imagined. Bishop Burnet, who was an eye witness to them, says, "That
 " the persecution was so much beyond
 " all the common measures of barbarity
 " and cruelty, that I confess they ought
 " not to be believed, unless I could give
 " more positive proofs of them, than are
 " now proper to be brought forth, since
 " it might prove fatal to many who are
 " yet in the power of their enemies †." But of that which Bishop Burnet was

* Life, page 51.

† Travels, Letter V.

silent about, from a regard to the sufferers, the world hath been informed since by means of a pamphlet written in French, where the method of dragooning the Protestants is briefly described*. They were plundered; they were tortured; they were murdered with every circumstance of the most unrelenting cruelty; and at the same time every method was used to prevent their escaping out of the kingdom. However, no less than one hundred and fifty thousand fled to other countries, and vast numbers of them came hither.

The first thing to be done, which was a matter of no small difficulty, was to provide lodgings for the large multitude who resorted to London, where the rent of houses is exceedingly high. Mr. Firmin, whose active mind always quickly suggested the best expedients, proposed to the lord mayor and court of aldermen that the pest-house †, then quite empty

* There are some extracts from this piece, if I remember right, in a valuable tract intitled Popery always the Same.

† London being formerly more subject to contagious distempers than now, this building was designed for the infected in order that the plague might not spread univervally.

of

of patients, should be devoted to the service of these strangers: and several hundreds of them were accommodated in that large and convenient place. As for relief in money, many thousands of pounds were raised for them, most of which went through Mr. Firmin's hands; and to contribute in the most effectual manner to their support, he set up a linen manufacture at Ipswich; which was the right way not only to prevent their being burdensome, but even to render them of service to the public at large. Towards the establishment of this manufacture, erecting a place of worship, and purchasing some necessaries, he himself contributed near one hundred and fifty pounds. Mr. Firmin's labours for the refugees were of a long continuance, for the persecution was carried on in France for several years with violence and rigour. In 1693, there were such numbers here, who needed relief, that besides granting them a brief, King William allowed them out of his privy purse, one thousand pounds per month, for thirty-nine months successively. The distribution of this royal bounty, was committed to the care of two bishops,

two

two knights, and a gentleman, but the management of it was left almost entirely to Mr. Firmin, sometimes with, but more commonly without their inspection *.

Whilst Mr. Firmin had this important charge upon his hands, he was obliged to exert himself also in behalf of other objects, whose distresses called loudly upon the benevolent, whilst the near relation in which they stood to this country, gave them a peculiar claim to the assistance of every inhabitant of it. These were the Irish nobility, gentry, clergy, and others of all ranks and conditions, who fled into England from the cruel proscriptions of James II. After the crown of these realms had been settled on King William and Queen Mary, King James still retained a number of friends in Ireland, which abounded with Papists; and in March 1689 he landed there, with about five thousand French soldiers and two hundred officers whom Louis XIV. had furnished him with†.

The Irish Papists, whenever it had been in their power, had always treated

* Life, page 51,—54.

† Tindal's Continuation of Rapin, vol. III. page 79, 80.

the Protestants with the most unrelenting cruelty. The bloody massacre in 1641 can never be forgotten. It has been computed that in the space of a few months upwards of one hundred and fifty thousand were actually murdered, and as many more forcibly driven from their habitations, and compelled to endure all the miseries of cold, hunger, and nakedness *. Many then living had been eye witnesses of the barbarities committed by the Papists, who, having now a king of their own religion at their head, and a French army to assist them, filled the Protestants, as may well be supposed, with horror and dread. King James sufficiently evidenced the savageness of his own disposition in several instances, and particularly in an act passed by his parliament, which attainted near three thousand at once of both sexes and of all ages. Amongst these were two archbishops, one duke, seventeen earls, seven countesses, twenty-eight viscounts, two viscountesses, seven bishops, eighteen barons, thirty-three baronets, fifty-one knights, eighty-three clergymen, two

* Rapin, vol. II. page 386, note ii.

thousand one hundred and eighty-one esquires and gentlemen; all of whom were declared traitors and adjudged to suffer the pains of forfeiture and death. A clause was also inserted, by means of which (besides what was enacted against these,) the estate of almost every Protestant in the kingdom was forfeited *. And that the Protestants might not be able to entertain a hope, that the rage and fury would cool down, the king gave up the royal prerogative of pardoning, after a certain time limited by the act; so that there was no way left of avoiding the terrible destruction but by a timely flight.

To England they came, which has long been the refuge of the persecuted and oppressed, and amongst their numerous friends Mr. Firmin was eminently distinguished by his activity and diligence. A brief was granted, of which he was one of the commissioners. Besides what might be raised by the brief, the ministers, church-wardens, and collectors of every parish in England, were to give an account of what sums they had severally

* Tindal's Continuation, vol. III. page 87, 88.

collected. Therefore on many post days for a long time together, several hundreds of letters came to his hands, and he himself received many collections, and paid them into the chamber of London. The money given by the king and queen was also intrusted to his management ; and it was in a great measure owing to his sollicitation that the royal bounty was obtained *.

The refugees were so numerous and their necessities so great, as to require a second brief; and the sum total, which went through Mr. Firmin's hands, was fifty-six thousand five hundred, sixty-six pounds, seven shillings and sixpence. The money was to be distributed by a particular number of commissioners, but he was the most constant of any man at their meetings, often attending from morning to night, without allowing himself any time for his meals. Besides the sums regularly distributed, he obtained and gave more considerable sums in a private way to particular persons, whose rank and quality seemed to render it im-

* Life, page 65.

proper for them to take off the common stock, or whose necessities required more than could be allowed out of it. For it was incumbent upon the managers to give no cause of offence, or lay themselves open to the charge of partiality, since any thing of that sort might have checked the benevolence of the public *.

But affairs in Ireland soon took a happy turn. In the month of July 1689, King William gained an important victory on the banks of the river Boyne, and obliged King James again to take refuge in France, his adherents being forced to submit to the conqueror. Their country being thus delivered, the Protestant refugees were enabled with safety to return to their houses, employments, and estates; and Mr. Firmin strenuously exerted himself to furnish them with necessaries for their journey. By a speedy removal they were materially benefited, and the charitable and generous of this nation, enabled to give larger assistance to such others as stood in need of their kindness. Mr. Firmin obtained great sums for this purpose; and one gentleman (Sir

* Life, page 66.

Thomas Cook) gave no less than fifteen hundred pounds, an instance of generosity which deserves to be recorded.

Mr. Firmin's kindness was sensibly felt and gratefully remembered, as appears by the following letter, from the most Reverend the Archbishop of Tuam and seven other bishops.

TO MR. THOMAS FIRMIN.

SIR,

Being occasionally met together at Dublin on a public account, and often discoursing of the great relief which the Protestants of this kingdom found amongst their brethren in England in the time of our late miseries, we cannot treat that subject without as frequent mention of your name, who so cheerfully and entirely devoted yourself to that ministry. We consider with all thankfulness, how much the public charity was improved by your industry, and we are witnesses of your indefatigable pains and faithfulness in the distribution, by which many thousands are preserved from perishing. We know also, that some who refused to take out of the common stock, as being desirous to cut off occasion of murmurs,

murmurs, were however, by your mediation, comfortably subsisted by private benevolences. We doubt not, but you and they have the earnest of your reward in the peace of your minds, which we pray God to fill with comforts and illuminate with his truths, making his grace to abound in them, who have abounded in their charity to others. And we intreat, that you, and all such as you know to have had their parts in this service, would believe, that we shall ever entertain a grateful remembrance of it; as some testimony whereof, we desire you, for yourself in particular, to receive this acknowledgment of your kindness to our brethren, and therein to your much obliged
and most humble servants,

J. TUAM.

W. Clonfert. N. Waterford.

B. Fernleigh. R. Clogher.

S. Elpin. W. Raphoe.

E. Cork and Ross.

This was a letter very worthy of the episcopal character, and a noble testimony of the high regard in which Mr. Firmin was held. Nor was this the only tribute of praise which he received on that

occasion, for a reverend dean, who had been one of the sufferers, addressed a poem to him “ on his incomparable charity and generous industry in relieving the Irish refugees.” In it he is compared, for his activity and zeal, to those ministring spirits, who, warmed with the divinest principle of love, are ever on the wing, and fly without ceasing to every place where distress calls for their aid, or they may be able to administer joy. Preachers moved their congregations, but the eloquence of his tongue, inspired by the feelings of his heart first moved many of the preachers; and as the sufferers had lost all things, so he for a while seemed lost to all things but them. Such are the leading sentiments of the poem*, the whole of which is expressive of the highest admiration and the warmest gratitude, nor is there the least need of any grains of allowance for the poetical license. Mr. Firmin was always very diligent in business, but more abundantly so in acts of kindness

* The writer of Mr. Firmin’s Life has given it entire, but the versification is not sufficiently smooth to please modern ears, on which account it is not inserted here.

and charity; and he justly deserved (if it be possible for a mortal to deserve) *the title of a godlike man.*

At a large expense he apprenticed many boys, and contributed to set them up in trade, if they had served diligently and faithfully. He justly considered this as a sort of charity, that extended to the whole of a man's life, and might be the ground of many charities in future, as it supplied them with the means of rising in the world, and of doing in time that for others, which some had done for them. The clergy of London and other dignified persons of the church, often assisted him very liberally in this good and useful work *. And there was one great clergyman, of whom he never spoke without particular respect and honour, on account of the vigour and active zeal, by which he was eminently distinguished in all the offices of religion and humanity; this was the honourable Dr. Henry Compton, Bishop of London †: whose zeal against Popery, when it was favored by the court; whose opposition to arbitrary power, when our liberties

* Life, page. 76.

† *ibid*, p. 55.

were in real danger; whose unwearied endeavours to promote virtue and piety, and whose generosity in relieving the distressed, have raised him to no small degree of eminence amongst the useful and worthy characters who have adorned this nation. Mr. Firmin was a witness to his conduct when in the strength and vigour of life, and saw how nobly he acted in difficult and trying seasons, boldly opposing the will of his prince, rather than acting contrary to the laws of his country; and standing forth as a champion for the Protestant cause, when at least to connive at Popery was essential to a man's interest at court *. The bishop was also sensible of Mr. Firmin's worth, and had a very high opinion of him.

There were at that time particular collections made every winter in the churches about London, for the use of

* He was suspended, in the year 1686, from all episcopal and other ecclesiastical jurisdiction, for refusing to comply with an illegal mandate of King James's in favour of popery. When the Prince of Orange landed, the Princess Anne put herself under his protection, and he headed a little army, who requested that he would be their commander. He bore also a distinguishing part in the glorious Revolution.

the poor in and near the city. Mr Firmin was the man who solicited the king's letter for making these collections, and took care of distributing his majesty's and the bishop of London's letters to the several ministers of the churches in London to be by them read and published. He waited on the lords of the treasury to receive the royal bounty, and when all the moneys were collected, and paid into the chamber of London to be divided amongst the several parishes, by the lord mayor and the bishop, no man could proportion their respective dividends with such exactness as Mr. Firmin. This was well known to their lordships, who therefore seldom made any alterations in his distributions. In all these matters, the church-wardens made their application to and received their orders from him, for which purpose the bishop would many times sign blank papers, trusting that Mr. Firmin would not fail of properly discharging the trust reposed in him, and as to the lord mayor he was always ready to give his hand

The whole of this charity was for so many years under Mr. Firmin's management,

ment, that he, happening to die some days before christmas, the king's letter was not obtained till the twelfth of January following; and when the collection was brought in from the several parishes, the managers were at a loss how to distribute it, and were glad to take their directions from his pattern *.

Much more however remains to be said of him, before we come to speak of his dissolution, for he was continually doing good, in methods as various, as the occasions which offered themselves to call forth his zeal and abilities into action.

* Life, p. 54.

C H A P.

C H A P. IV.

Mr. Firmin's undaunted Zeal in the Service of his Country as a Politician and a Patriot. His Enmity to all kinds of Licentiousness: his Endeavours to promote Virtue and Piety; his strong Abhorrence of the Crime of Swearing, and the Method which he used to check this Vice in any of his Acquaintance.

THOSE who have the least acquaintance with the English History, need not to be informed, that King James II. was excluded from the throne of these realms, for his open attempts to subvert our religion and liberties. The establishment of Popery and arbitrary power appeared to be his darling objects; and those, who opposed his attempts, had much to fear from his vindictive temper *. The unhappy persons

* See the preamble to the Declaration setting forth the reasons for exalting the Prince and Princess of Orange to the throne. *Rapin*, vol. II. p. 794—5.
who

who had joined themselves to the Duke of Monmouth in his rash enterprize, were treated with the most unrelenting cruelty, as were many others whom the king suspected to be unfriendly to his views. Amongst others Mr. Samuel Johnson, a divine of the church of England, who was a man of great learning and a most exemplary character, felt the weight of his vengeance. He had suffered imprisonment for several years, not having been able to pay a fine, laid on him for writing in the cause of liberty. Instead of endeavouring to free himself from confinement by mean submissions, he caused to be printed and dispersed several small pieces against Popery. This was very displeasing to the king, but that which incensed his majesty to the highest degree was, "His humble and hearty address to all the Protestants in the present army." In this he endeavoured to display the reasons, which ought to prevent them from being the instruments of the court in subverting our religion and government. His arguments made such impressions on the minds of the officers and soldiers, that his address &c. was thought very conducive

conducive to the Revolution, as most of the army went over to the Prince of Orange about two years afterwards. For the present, it was the cause of no small sufferings to Mr. Johnson. He was condemned to be degraded *ex officio et beneficio*, to stand three times in the pillory, to pay a fine of five hundred marks, and to be whipped from Newgate to Tyburn. The whipping, which was rigorously inflicted December 1, 1686, he bore with amazing firmness; and, notwithstanding what he had suffered, continued, though in prison, to employ his pen in the service of his country *.

It was, no doubt, imagined by the tyrant James, that punishments, so dreadfully severe, would cause universal terror; but there always have been some men of brave spirits even in the most dangerous times to stand up for our liberties; and to Mr. Firmin's honour be it spoken, he was one of that number. He was ever mindful of those who suffered for conscience' sake, or for asserting our just rights. He printed a great many sheets

* See his life in the Biographia Britannica, or the Biographical Dictionary, also Burnet's and Rapin's Histories.

and some books, the design of which was, to excite his countrymen to look about them, and prevent the ruin, which threatened our constitution and laws. Like a great and good citizen he stood firm, and, in very dangerous times, pursued those measures, to which his duty as a member of society directed him, not moved by the fear of those consequences, which, without doubt, intimidated many. More particularly he set himself to oppose with great vigour that attempt of the king's on our religion and liberties, which was rendered plausible and insnaring by an appearance of justice and moderation. This was his *Declaration for toleration and indulgence in religion*, which he commanded to be read in all the churches, merely on his own authority in contradiction to express acts of parliament. Mr. Firmin used his utmost endeavours to convince the public of the very bad tendency and design of this specious Declaration. He expended considerable sums both in publishing and purchasing such pamphlets as were written with a view to open the eyes of the people, circulating and dispersing them for the general good, at no small cost to himself.

himself *. Let it not however be imagined from hence, that he was an enemy to liberty of conscience in its greatest extent; never did any man possess a more liberal and enlarged mind. But he well knew that, if the king had a right to dispense with the observance of one law, he might do the same with regard to all, and then a parliament would be useless, and our constitution totally subverted. This induced him strenuously to oppose the dispensing power, and though he was very sensible that no worth or excellency of character would protect any man from the cruel revenge of James, yet his heart was so filled with love to his country, that fear could find no place in it.

The success of the Prince of Orange's attempt to rescue this nation from Popery and slavery was very doubtful; and, if it had failed, those, who favoured it would have become bleeding sacrifices to their patriotic zeal. The fate of those who joined the Duke of Monmouth was then fresh in every one's memory. Mr Firmin however furthered the design of the

* Life, page 61.

Prince to the very utmost of his power; and, when he was seated on the throne of these realms, our disinterested patriot had farther opportunities of testifying how true a friend he was to the national interest. A new government being happily established, he contributed not a little towards its welfare and stability.

There has long been a prevailing inclination in this country to encourage French fashions, which have a natural tendency to effeminate, and French manufactures, which must certainly impoverish us. This fondness for the productions of that vain fantastic people has been no small source of their power and riches, which it behoves all true Britons to strive to reduce within narrow bounds. In Mr. Firmin's days particularly it was a most important duty, when that ambitious Prince Louis XIV. aspired to universal empire, and looked with an envious eye on Britain, which, after its happy deliverance by the Revolution, became the greatest obstacle to the accomplishment of his proud designs.

To ruin and destroy us was the wish and desire of Louis; and therefore Mr. Firmin most diligently promoted the manufactures

nufactures of the *Royal Lustring Company*, which was not only beneficial to the nation, by supporting numbers amongst our own poor, but also a vast prejudice to our grand enemy, by diminishing a considerable source of their riches. He, together with Mr. Renew (who was one of the French refugees) were at much expense to prevent the bringing over silks from France, and those other commodities, which several merchants, encouraged by the vain and frivolous who were more fond of the trifling ornaments of dress, than solicitous about the welfare of their country, ventured, in spite of the laws, to import. Mr. Renew's conduct was highly approved of by parliament, who voted him an honourable reward for his services*; and Mr. Firmin likewise deserved well of the public; for both these gentlemen exposed themselves to great danger. They ran the hazard of their lives from the revenge of those whom they prosecuted, who were enraged beyond measure at the interruption of so gainful a trade, and the heavy losses to which a detection exposed them.

* Tindal's Continuation of Rapin, vol. III. p. 371—3.

It was Mr. Firmin who had the greatest hand, and used the most effectual endeavours in procuring acts of parliament and rules of court for the support and encouragement of that company, which was set up to furnish us with silks manufactured amongst ourselves, which hath been a great advantage and credit to the nation. And they were his and Mr. Renew's agents, who gave either the first, or at least very early intelligence of the French invasion, which was designed to have followed the projected assassination of King William *. Both of these schemes were defeated by a timely discovery; and Mr. Firmin was an honoured instrument in saving us from the dreadful and impending mischief.

But zealous as he was for the new government, and unwearied in his endeavours to promote its interests, yet he had a tender regard for those clergymen, who, from motives of pure conscience, scrupled taking the oaths of allegiance to it, and thereby lost their preferments. The doctrines of passive obedience and non-resistance, how absurd soever they

* Life, page 63.

now appear, had been espoused and aided by almost the whole body of the clergy, during the reign of Charles II. When James was on the throne, the same principles were inculcated ; but his bold attempts to subvert our most sacred rights, caused a general alarm : and notwithstanding the clergy had been so long inculcating on the people, that kings were accountable only to God, great numbers of them were now convinced of their error, and allowed that resistance, in some cases, was lawful.

There were others, who, being too proud to acknowledge they had been mistaken, took the oaths required, but with secret reservations, and the help of those quibbling evasive methods, which too often serve to lull men's consciences asleep, when they sacrifice their integrity at the shrine of profit and ambition? some still remained, men of learning, virtue and piety, who resolving to adhere to what they had preached, refused to take the oaths; and government was laid under the unhappy necessity of depriving several as worthy of the places which they filled in the church as any of their contemporaries.

Mr.

Mr. Firmin felt himself strongly disposed to relieve them, and his charity, which was unconfined and impartial, began to exert itself in collecting money for these deprived Nonjurors, following a scheme drawn up by Mr. Kettlewell, a person of eminent piety, who himself was one of them.

Mr Firmin, however, did not proceed as he intended in pursuing this benevolent design; being deterred from it by some friends of high rank, who told him that this scheme was illegal, being calculated for the support of the enemies of government *. Many perhaps will be of opinion that there could be nothing illegal in this humane action; for the Nonjurors were men of honour and conscience, as appeared by the proof which they gave of their integrity, in adhering to the doctrines they had taught, though attended with the loss of their valuable preferments. But Mr. Firmin, no doubt, thought that there was much force and strength in the reasons which his noble friends alledged against his scheme; and

* Dr. Birch's Life of Dr. Tillotson, p.320.

indeed,

indeed, considering what various methods were used, again to bring in our former oppressor, very extraordinary caution was absolutely necessary.

Mr. Firmin however, though a bold assertor of the liberties of the nation, was at the same time a determined enemy to all licentiousness. Soon after the Revolution, it was thought advisable by the friends of that cause, to put a stop as far as was possible to all open profaneness; for which purpose many good laws were enacted, and several formed themselves into a *Society for the Reformation of Manners*. To countenance the members of this excellent institution, Mr. Firmin contributed by his advice, assistance and solicitations, as much as his leisure from his other benevolent and useful undertakings would permit him: as for his purse, that was always with them *. These societies were not confined to the capital, but were formed also in different parts of the country, and very good effects arose from them. Practical treatises were distributed, and such an attention to the

* Life, page 63.

duties of religion excited in numbers, as had not been known for a long time before *.

Mr. Firmin greatly approved the custom of distributing plain, useful books, as they might not only prove beneficial to those who should then read them, but, being preserved in a family, or dispersed abroad, might become the means of doing good even to succeeding generations. The seeds of virtue and religion, when once sown in a family, may continue for ages to bring forth some fruit, and the forming one mind to real piety may, in the issue of things, be attended with the happiest consequences to numbers. He often printed ten thousand copies of the Scripture Catechism, of which his friend Dr. Worthington was supposed to be the author. These were given to his spinners and their children, and to the children of Christ's church Hospital, whom he also engaged by rewards to learn it by heart, furnishing them first with the means of instruction, and then proposing further encouragement to such as were disposed to make a proper use

* Tindal's continuation of Rapin, vol. III. p. 374.
of

of them. Besides doing this, he lodged great numbers with booksellers, to be sold at a cheaper rate than they could have afforded them, hoping that by this means they would be dispersed all over England. He valued this catechism, because it was wholly in the words of Scripture, favoured no particular party or persuasion, and was therefore calculated to be of general use as it did not lead the young into controversies and debates *.

The members of the above-mentioned excellent societies were men of worth and reputation, and they found greater benefit arising from their useful and disinterested labours, than merely exciting an attention to the external duties of religion. Swearing, drunkenness, lewdness, and the profanation of the Lord's day, were also much restrained; for they made it a rule to inform against such as offended in these instances; and threw that part of the fine which the law gave to them into a common stock, for promoting their other charitable designs.

As to swearing, Mr. Firmin's zeal against that most inexcusable vice, which

* Life, page 50.

brings the most solemn oaths, once regarded as the bonds of society, into contempt, was particularly warm. If in coffee-houses, or other places, he heard any swearing, he would immediately challenge the forfeiture appointed by law, and he always applied it to the use of the poor; so that in the companies which he frequented, an oath was seldom heard. It was also his rule to raise the forfeiture according to the quality of the person offending; nor would he let a nobleman, or one of distinguished rank, particularly a clergyman, get off at the ordinary rate. It was doubled or trebled upon them, especially if such were, very common swearers, or their oaths more than ordinarily profane and impious. If any refused to pay what he demanded, he would tell them it was for the service of the poor, whose collector and steward he was. If they still refused, he assured them they should be set down by him in the list of his incorrigible swearers, and that afterwards he never would own them for his acquaintance, or speak to them as such. And so highly was his friendship valued, that many noble persons would not endure this last, but submitted to do as he required.

required *. As to Mr. Firmin himself, the friend who first wrote his life declares "that though he conversed with him daily for almost forty-four years, he never once heard an oath from him." In this he was the more deserving of commendation, because his temper was naturally quick and warm, and he had oftentimes great provocations to anger, one of the principal causes of rash and intemperate swearing. Would men of character and worth imitate his example, and also check the inexcusable profaneness (and profaneness is ever inexcusable) of any who in their company are guilty of it, it might be, and in various instances has been, attended with very good effects ; for the extreme absurdity of profane swearing seems to be universally acknowledged.

Such were Mr. Firmin's regards to the liberties of his country, and to the interests of virtue. What rendered him so fixed, steady, and uniform, was his firm persuasion of the truth and importance of the religion of Jesus. He was a sincere christian from inquiry and conviction ; and he fought for the articles of his faith,

* Life, page 64.

as well as for rules for the conduct of his life in the pure word of God. His religious sentiments were the result of cool, impartial examination; and as his attachment to these sentiments, together with his zealous, but rational endeavours to promote an attention to them, has ever been reckoned a distinguishing part of his character, and caused him to be much taken notice of in his own days; the next chapter shall give an account of some of the most striking particulars.

C H - A P.

C H A P. V.

An Account of Mr. Firmin's religious Sentiments, and of his pious Endeavours to promote what appeared to him to be the true Doctrines of the Gospel. His great Kindness to Mr. Biddle, together with some Memoirs of that extraordinary Man. The Friendship of Archbishop Tillotson and Bishop Fowler for Mr. Firmin, with some Particulars concerning these eminent and worthy Divines. Other Instances of Mr. Firmin's Charity to the Sufferers for Religion.

IT may be reasonably supposed that Mr. Firmin's mind was impressed with sentiments of piety from his childhood. The Reader will naturally conclude that this was the case, from the character given of his parents in the first chapter ; for such as are truly religious will endeavour, by all rational methods, to form the minds of others, particularly the minds of their children, to the same temper. The diligence and fidelity which

Mr. Firmin displayed when an apprentice afford also very good evidence of the pious care of his parents ; and he gave other proofs, even in his youthful days, of an uncommon regard to the cause of religion. His mind was open to the reception of its pure and true doctrines, for he justly thought that sincere attempts to understand the Scriptures, would always increase a man's love and regard for them.

His master was an Arminian, a hearer of the celebrated Mr. John Goodwin, who preached in Coleman Street *. His warm zeal for liberty led him to be a strenuous defender of those by whom King Charles was brought to the block ; for writing in defence of whom, he was excepted out of the act of grace which was passed at the Restoration †. He had also the hardiness to introduce Arminianism amongst the disciples of Calvin, which, considering the zeal then displayed in behalf of that reformer's sentiments

* Life, page 6.

† I do not remember that he suffered any punishment, but on Bartholomew day he was ejected from his living for Nonconformity. *Nonconformist's Memorial*, vol. I. page 151.

amongst his numerous partizans, was a very bold undertaking. But both his courage and his abilities were very great, and by hearing his learned discourses, Mr. Firmin, who was naturally inquisitive, became a free inquirer in matters of religion. In consequence of this, he soon exchanged the harsh opinions of Calvin, in which he had been educated, for those of Arminius and the remonstrants, which, he thought, were not only more agreeable to reason, but also more honourable to God.

But the predestinarian notions were not the only ones which Mr. Firmin, after proper examination, rejected. His departure was much wider from that which is commonly styled the orthodox faith. He was entirely ignorant of the learned languages, and also of the school logic and philosophy; but his understanding and judgment were very remarkable. And to these endowments of nature, improved by as much reading and conversation as his business allowed him time for, was united a sincere love of truth, which rendered him much fitter to judge what were really the doctrines of revelation than most of those who spend their

whole lives in a college. Such have oftentimes a large stock of learning without any penetration, their knowledge consisting mostly in an acquaintance with words, or the opinions of antiquated authors upon different subjects. And when learning and penetration have been united, there has been too much reason to complain, that, either through the prejudices of education, or the strong bias of worldly interest, they have been generally employed in supporting what is commonly received, or hath had the sanction of the public authority.

Mr. Firmin's mind was not thus shackled. Uninfluenced by those prejudices which bias too many, he heard with attention what Mr. Goodwin advanced on man's free agency, and becoming at the same time acquainted with Mr. Biddle, was persuaded, by his arguments, to adopt other notions likewise with regard to the nature of the Deity. He it was who convinced him, that the unity of God is a unity of person as well as of nature, and that there is no being whatsoever who can be likened unto the Most High*.

* Life, page 10.

That

That there are three Persons in the Godhead equal in power and glory, is still the doctrine generally received amongst christians; and at the time when Mr. Firmin began his religious inquiries the contrary had been advanced by very few in England.

A woman, who appeared to be a weak enthusiast, was burnt for her heterodox notions on the subject of the Trinity in the reign of King Edward VI. much against the will of that mild and benevolent young prince, who submitted entirely to the judgment of some of his learned instructors, when he signed the warrant. George Van-Parre likewise, a Dutchman, who led a most devout and exemplary life, suffered at the same time, and in the same manner for affirming "that the Father only was God *." Bartholomew Legate, and Edward Wightman, were also burnt in the reign of James I. That monarch, who was not a little vain of his theological abilities, and very fond of displaying them, admitted the former to his presence, and endeavoured to convince him, that he

* Burnet's History of the Reformation abridged, vol. II. page 81—82.

was in an error, but without effect. Neither the arguments, nor (what is more calculated to weigh with most minds) the hope of favour from his prince, could move him from his allegiance to the God and Father of all. The converts to these martyrs (if they made any) kept their opinions pretty much to themselves, very probably thinking, that it would be in vain to offer any defence of them to the public, at a time when men's prejudices were so strong, and the government so cruel and intolerant.

These circumstances were very discouraging to a young man, nor had the treatment, which his instructor met with any tendency to recommend his sentiments. But as soon as ever Mr. Firmin was fully convinced, that the peerless and unrivalled Majesty of God could be supported on no other principles than those which maintain his perfect unity, he set himself industriously to propagate this belief. Those were encouraged by him, whose abilities enabled them to defend the Unitarian doctrines in their writings, and at great pains and expense he dispersed these writings abroad. This
zeal

zeal exposed him both to reproach and danger, but such evils he always slighted, when they stood in competition with what he thought his duty. Mr. Biddle was a man of great note, much distinguished for real worth and excellency of character, and not a little by his many sufferings. He was likewise so highly valued, and so generously assisted by Mr. Firmin, whose attachment to him made his own character the more remarkable, that it would be a great omission not to say a few things concerning him; nor can an acquaintance with some circumstances, relating to this extraordinary person, fail of being agreeable to the Reader, if he sincerely love the patient, faithful friends of virtue and religion.

Mr. Biddle was born in the year 1615, at Wotton under Edge, in Gloucestershire, and had his education at the free-school near that place. His abilities were very promising, and even in his younger days, a singular piety of mind was observed in him *. When sent to

* Life of John Biddle, M. A. published in a collection of Unitarian Tracts, in 4to, printed in 1691, page 4. His Life has also a place in every Biographical work of any note.

Oxford, he prosecuted his studies with great assiduity, and was always more determined by reasons than by authority. In 1641, he took his degree of Master of Arts with much applause, and having received ample recommendations from the principal persons in that university, was chosen to be master of a free school in the city of Gloucester. In this situation he was highly esteemed for his diligence and abilities as a tutor, and also for his virtuous manners. He now set himself to read the Holy Scriptures with great attention; but no Socinian books whatever. Whilst he was perusing the sacred writings he fervently implored divine illumination, praying that the spirit of truth would lead him into all truth.

It cannot be supposed that a being, infinite in goodness and mercy, would suffer such a man to fall into any dangerous error. Nor can it on the other hand be imagined, that God enlightens the mind so far as to enable it to judge rightly on every point of controversy. The most learned, sober, and devout men have differed widely in their sentiments; from whence we may infer that this
diversity

diversity is, for some very wise reasons, permitted. Mr. Biddle appears to have pursued his studies, in the manner which became a lover of the Gospel. It soon, however, appeared evident to him, that the common doctrine of the Trinity was not well grounded either in reason or revelation; being free and impartial in judging, he was also very open and generous in speaking, and did, as occasion offered, mention those reasons which induced him to question it.

This caused an accusation of heresy to be brought against him, and, being summoned before the magistrates, he exhibited in writing a confession of Faith, respecting the doctrine about which he was accused. This confession not being thought satisfactory, he made another more explicit than the former. He was not such an enthusiast as to expose himself unnecessarily to sufferings, but endeavoured both to avoid imprisonment, and to keep a good conscience. Yet this opposition did not intimidate, but led him to examine the Scriptures on this point with greater accuracy, by which means he was the more confirmed in his opinions. He then drew up what was afterwards

afterwards published under the title of
 “ Twelve arguments drawn out of the
 “ Scriptures wherein the commonly re-
 “ ceived opinion, touching the Deity of
 “ the Holy Spirit, is clearly and fully
 “ refuted.” These he communicated in
 manuscript to some of his acquaintance,
 one of whom was ungenerous enough to
 betray him to the magistrates of Glou-
 ceſter, and to the committee of parlia-
 ment then reſiding there. In conſe-
 quence of this, he was committed Decem-
 ber 2d, 1645, to the common jail; which
 treatment was the more ſevere, as he
 was at that time ill of a dangerous fever.
 He did however procure a ſpeedy en-
 largement, through the intereſt of an
 eminent perſon in Glouceſterſhire, who
 gave ſecurity for his appearance when-
 ever it ſhould pleaſe the parliament to
 ſend for him.

Six months after he had been ſet at
 liberty, he was ſummoned to appear at
 Weſtminſter, and he freely confeſſed to
 the committee appointed to examine him,
 “ That he was ready to hear whatever
 “ could be oppoſed to him, and if he
 “ could not make out his opinions to be
 “ true, he would then honeſtly confeſs his
 “ error.

" error. What shall befall me (says he)
 " I refer to the disposal of the all-wise
 " God, whose glory is dearer to me not
 " only than my liberty, but than my
 " life." He was here wearied out with
 tedious and expensive delays, till at
 length his case being referred to the as-
 sembly of divines then sitting at West-
 minster; he often appeared before some
 of them, and gave them in writing, his
 Twelve Arguments against the Deity of
 the Holy Spirit, which were printed the
 same year. This made a great noise,
 the author was summoned to appear at
 the bar of the house of commons, and on
 being asked Whether he owned the
 book and the arguments contained in it,
 he answered in the affirmative. Upon
 this he was remanded back to prison,
 and the house ordered that his book
 should be called in, and burnt by the
 hangman, which was accordingly done.

It has been said, that in May 1648, the
 assembly of divines endeavoured to pre-
 vail on the parliament to put Mr. Biddle
 to death; certain it is, to their eternal
 shame and dishonour, that they did ac-
 tually procure a cruel, unjust, and perse-
 cuting ordinance to be passed, making it
death

death to oppose the sentiments, which they saw fit to establish, relating to the Deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is hard to say, whether, in this affair, the assembly were most destitute of the temper which ought to adorn the ministers of the Gospel, or the parliament of that wisdom which is necessary for lawgivers. The former were met as the representatives of a very respectable part of the church to consult about its interests; and the latter, the parliament, had solemnly engaged to reform religion both in discipline and doctrine. This then was a time when full liberty should have been given to all to offer their sentiments on religious matters; and Mr. Biddle's piety, modesty and learning entitled him, at least, to a fair and patient hearing. But so far was he from being able to obtain such justice, that he probably owed his life merely to the great dissensions which arose amongst the parliament on various subjects. Nevertheless, though he did not suffer death, his confinement was made close for a while, until by means of the confused state of public affairs, a sort of universal toleration was introduced. He was then allowed more liberty by his keeper, who suffered him,
upon

upon security given, to go into Staffordshire, where a justice of the peace entertained him most courteously, and left him a legacy at his decease; which kindness was very seasonable, as he had been, whilst under restraint, at vast charges. The liberty which he enjoyed was, however, but of short continuance. Serjeant Bradshaw, president of the council of state, being informed of the indulgence which had been granted to him, caused him to be recalled and more strictly confined. It was unfortunate for Mr. Biddle that the charge of heresy and blasphemy rendered him so odious, that hardly any one would converse with him. Dr. Peter Gunning, afterwards Bishop of Ely, was the only divine who vouchsafed to visit this good man in his six years confinement and restraint. It ought likewise to be mentioned to the honour of the great and good Archbishop Usher, that passing through Gloucester at the time when Mr. Biddle's troubles began, he endeavoured to convince him that he was in an error, though without effect. Thus persecuted and forsaken, his whole substance was spent, and not having enough to pay for an ordinary meal, he was glad
to

to support himself in the cheapest manner possible. A draught of milk, morning and evening, was very frequently all the sustenance which he had. In these deplorable circumstances, his learning and abilities did however at length procure him some comfortable relief, he being employed by Roger Daniel, of London, to correct an edition of the Greek Septuagint Bible, which was then about to be printed.

In 1651, the parliament published a general act of oblivion, and Mr. Biddle improved that liberty to which he was restored, by meeting with his friends every Lord's day for the purpose of expounding the Scriptures, and discoursing on them, being always ready to defend his own peculiar sentiments whenever called upon. This made the London ministers very uneasy; but they could not prevent it. Dr. Gunning who had visited him in his confinement, took the most rational method of stopping the progress of his opinions, by disputing publicly with him in his meeting. Mr. Biddle acquitted himself so well on this occasion, that he gained much credit both to himself and his cause, which some gentlemen

gentlemen of the opposite party had the ingenuity to acknowledge, as they could not help admiring his learning and judgment, joined to a surprising readiness and skill in the Holy Scriptures.

This happened in the year 1654, when he also published a Scripture Catechism, which brought him into fresh troubles. A complaint was made against it in the house of commons; he was brought to the bar, and asked Whether he had written that book. He did not see fit to avow it, as he had done, when he first stood before the same tribunal, but answered, in the true spirit of an Englishman, by asking, "Whether it seemed reasonable that one brought before a judgment seat as a criminal should accuse himself?" To require this is without doubt against all law and reason, but heresy was accounted so dreadful a crime, that, though it could not be clearly proved against him (since he refused to betray his just rights by making a confession of it), yet the catechism was ordered to be burnt by the common hangman; and he, as the supposed author, was committed close prisoner to the Gate-house, and denied the use of pen, ink, paper, or the access
of

of any visitant. And as if this were nothing, a bill was ordered to be brought into the house of commons for punishing him farther. But, since what had been already done was illegal, he obtained his liberty after six months imprisonment.

About a year after this, he was brought into greater danger. One Griffin, provoked to find that many of his congregation had embraced Mr. Biddle's notions concerning the Trinity, challenged him publicly to dispute the matter. This Mr. Biddle would willingly have declined doing, not being forward to excite fresh clamours, unless some valuable ends were likely to be answered. Griffin, however, being importunate, the meeting was fixed, and a numerous audience being assembled, he asked "If any man there
 " would deny that Christ was God most
 " high." Mr. Biddle resolutely answered
 " I do deny it." The views of Griffin and his party were now answered. This zealot was by no means a match for Mr. Biddle in the way of argument, of which being conscious, instead of giving him another meeting, as was proposed, he accused him of blasphemy, of which his denial of Griffin's question was clear
 and

and positive proof, according to the ordinance against blasphemy and heresy then but lately made.

Oliver Cromwell, who had at that time the supreme command, under the title of Protector, was not willing, for certain political reasons, that Mr. Biddle should be brought to a trial, and therefore kept him a while in prison, but at length banished him to the isle of Scilly, being weary of receiving petitions for and against him. Towards his support in this confinement he allowed him one hundred crowns a-year. It is said that this pension was obtained by Mr. Firmin's solicitations, who was then indeed very young, but possibly by his agreeable address and great courage he might recommend himself to the Protector's favour; for Mr. Firmin when an apprentice ventured to deliver a petition into the Protector's hand, praying that Mr. Biddle might be released out of Newgate. Cromwell, though a friend to toleration, thought it his interest to appear zealous for religion, in the common acceptation of the word zeal, and thus replied to his young petitioner; " You curl-pate boy
" you, do you think I will shew any fa-
" your

“ your to a man that denies his Saviour
 “ and disturbs the government ? ” So
 strong was Mr. Firmin’s attachment to
 Mr. Biddle, that he had lodged and
 boarded him gratis, thinking himself am-
 ply repaid by his improving conversation.
 In the year 1658, after about three years
 exile, the Protector, moved by the repeated
 intercessions of many of Mr. Biddle’s
 friends, ordered him to be brought back
 to London ; and nothing being then laid
 to his charge, he was set at liberty.
 Whilst in Scilly he had employed him-
 self in studying the Scriptures ; and being
 delivered from confinement, he again re-
 sumed his religious exercises, and his
 friends formed themselves into a church
 of which he was pastor.

On the death of Cromwell, a parlia-
 ment was called, which, it was thought,
 would be dangerous to Mr. Biddle. He,
 therefore, took the advice of a noble
 friend, and retired into the country till
 the danger was over ; when he returned
 to his pastoral care. On the restoration
 of Charles II. when the meetings of all
 dissenters were regarded as seditious,

* Birch’s Life of Archbishop Tillotson, page 319.
 Mr.

Mr. Biddle held his in a private manner till June 1662, when himself and some of his friends being met for divine worship, they were all seized and sent to prison, without being admitted to bail. Upon their trial at the following sessions, the hearers were fined twenty pounds each, and Mr. Biddle one hundred, and ordered to lie in prison till that sum was paid. In less than five weeks after, through the noisomeness of the place and the want of air, he contracted a disease which put an end to his life on the 22d of September, 1662, in the forty-seventh year of his age. Thus was he numbered amongst those *who were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus*. He appears by the most authentic memorials to have closely studied the Sacred Writings, especially the New Testament, which he retained in his memory verbatim, not only in English, but in Greek, as far as the fourth chapter of the book of Revelations. In his moral conduct, he was not only irreproachable, but exemplary; he could not bear to hear a sentence of Holy Writ used vainly or lightly, and his mind appeared at all times to be filled with the most awful reverence for the Deity.

Deity. When engaged in private devotion, he used frequently to prostrate himself on the ground, after the manner of our Saviour in his agony ; which posture he used to recommend to his most intimate friends as the proper expression of the deepest humiliation.

Mr. Firmin's love and regard for him were no small proof of his worth ; and it is highly probable, that the early acquaintance which he made with this most excellent man, contributed as much as any thing to his firm establishment in virtuous and religious principles. It would have afforded good Mr. Biddle very little satisfaction had he made Mr. Firmin a convert to his opinions only : “ He valued not his doctrines for speculation
“ but practice, insomuch that he would
“ not discourse of those points wherein
“ he differed from others, with those that
“ appeared not religious according to their
“ knowledge. Neither could he bear
“ those that dissembled in profession for
“ worldly interest *.” He had the sublime pleasure of seeing Mr. Firmin improve under his instructions in the most valuable qualities, though he was re-

* Life prefixed to his Tracts.

moved

moved to a better world, before he had an opportunity of seeing how very extensively useful his young disciple would be in this.

Mr. Firmin was at all times very free and open in declaring his Unitarian sentiments, though they were then so obnoxious; but it was not till after the Revolution, that he greatly exerted himself in propagating them. Antecedent to that period, the friends of the constitution were so anxious about the national liberties, and such as attended to religious inquiries so much taken up with the Popish controversy, that but few had inclination or leisure to attend to other disputes. These, and not any fear of danger, seem to be the principal reasons, which induced Mr. Firmin in some degree to suppress his zeal during the earlier part of his life. The toleration act was no security to such as avowed or published his sentiments; on the contrary a very severe statute was enacted by parliament against all who in any manner whatsoever opposed or denied the commonly received doctrines concerning the Trinity. Notwithstanding this, Mr. Firmin was at great expense

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to have books printed explaining and defending the Unitarian notions, and these he freely gave away to as many as would read them. He revered the constitution, and made a point of obeying all the laws of his country, as far as they were of a civil nature. It appears, however, from many parts of his conduct, to have been his opinion, that magistrates had no right to prevent any man from professing those opinions, which his conscience led him to adopt; nor would he submit to that act of the legislature, which interfered with the peculiar province of the Almighty. But severe as the act was against all who opposed the common doctrines, Mr. Firmin was never put to any trouble, though his zeal against them was so well known. Nor did his reverend and right reverend friends decline acquaintance with him, thinking it their duty to give all the countenance in their power to so useful and good a man.

The illustrious Queen Mary, that ornament to her sex, whose virtues added lustre to a crown, condescended also to manifest the sincerest friendship towards him. She had heard with pleasure and approbation

approbation of Mr. Firmin's activity and diligence in promoting every charitable design. Being informed also that he was heterodox in the articles of our blessed Saviour's divinity, and the doctrine of satisfaction, she spoke to Archbishop Tillotson, and earnestly recommended it to him, to set his friend Mr. Firmin right in those points, which she deemed a matter of great moment and importance. The Archbishop replied that he had often attempted it, but in vain, not being able by any arguments he could use to alter the opinions which he had so long formed on these subjects. However, his Grace published the sermons which he had formerly preached against the Socinians, and sent Mr. Firmin one of the first copies from the press. He was not convinced either by Dr. Tillotson's reasonings, or his arguments from the Holy Scriptures; he caused a respectful answer to be drawn up and published, and himself gave the Archbishop a copy of it. To this his Grace, after he had read it, only said "my Lord of Sarum (meaning that very celebrated and worthy divine Bishop Burnet) shall humble your writers." Dr. Tillotson indeed in his behaviour

haviour to Mr. Firmin, as well as in a variety of other instances, gave full proof that a man may be possessed of the most shining abilities, and be raised to the highest station, and yet retain all that humility and meekness of spirit, which is more amiable than common, in persons so highly distinguished as he was. He never expressed the least degree of coldness towards Mr. Firmin on account of the answer made to his Sermons, but used to inquire in the same familiar manner as before "How does my son Giles," for so he called Mr. Firmin's son, who is mentioned in the second chapter as dying when just setting out in life *.

The regard which the Archbishop shewed Mr. Firmin, purely on account of his many valuable qualities, exposed him to the charge of being a Socinian at heart, an accusation which was entirely groundless. But besides his friendship with a chief of that party, he had given furious bigots no small disgust, by candidly acknowledging that the Socinian writers displayed temper, judgment, and learning in the controversy, between

* Life, page 15. 17. Birch's Life of Archbishop Tillotson, page, 321.

them and the orthodox. This greatly offended all those zealots, who will not allow an adversary to have common sense or common honesty; but it had a very good effect on the minds of those, whom he endeavoured to convince of an error. In the book, which Mr. Firmin caused to be drawn up in answer to his Sermons, he was styled "the common father of the nation, and is acknowledged to have instructed the Socinians themselves, with the air and language of a father, not of an adversary or a judge." And it was added "that they were concerned for their own reputation to reverence his person and admonitions." Of what unspeakable service would it be to the cause of charity and truth, if all controversies were managed by persons of such temper and judgment.

The time, when Mr. Firmin was most active in his opposition to the doctrine of the Trinity, was the most favourable that could be to the views of the Unitarians, the defenders of the orthodox faith being greatly divided amongst themselves, some opposing, with much heat and virulence, the explanations which had been given

by others. To give an account of the various solutions, which the advocates for the doctrine of the Trinity have offered by way of explaining this mystery, would be only to set before the Reader, innumerable sentences of unintelligible jargon, and which, as far as they can be understood, absolutely contradict one another. Essences and existencies, hypostases and personalities, priorities and co-equalities, Unity in Plurality, and Trinity in Unity are but a few of the phrases, which men have invented to express their ideas on this subject. If it be a doctrine of revelation that there are "Three persons in the Godhead, and
 "that these three are one God equal in
 "power and glory, the Son begotten of
 "the Father, and the Holy Ghost proceeding from the Father and the Son,
 "and yet none to be afore or after
 "another, none to be greater or less than
 "another:" If such be the express doctrine of revelation, yet all attempts to explain it only darken the matter; for language does not furnish us with words to describe, nor has the Divine Being given us ideas to comprehend it; and therefore all such endeavours are unprofitable

profitable and vain. However there were several divines, contemporaries with Mr. Firmin, who distinguished themselves by the various efforts which they made to render intelligible what all acknowledged to be a mystery. Their different solutions only served to puzzle the question, and though all endeavoured to explain the thing, yet, as their definitions happened to be contradictory, they abused each other most heartily as heretics and infidels.

The chief of these renowned champions were the two celebrated doctors South and Sherlock. Both of them men of genius and learning, but each immoderately attached to his own peculiar notions, and bent upon defending them with all the fury, which theological zeal could inspire. South's friends, who were the most numerous and powerful party, made complaint to the heads of the colleges at Oxford, the university of which censured Sherlock's notions by a solemn decree in convocation, wherein they were declared to be "False, impious" and heretical, and his book ordered to "be burned by the hands of the common hangman." Sherlock treated the Ox-

ford decree with the utmost contempt, retorting the charge of heresy upon his antagonists; each party had their respective adherents, and in the course of the debate various solutions of the mystery were proposed by different writers, who maintained their respective and contradictory opinions with no small degree of warmth and rancour. These debates caused the Unitarian party to triumph not a little; for they thought it absurd that they should be condemned for not receiving a doctrine, which the most learned of its advocates could not agree in explaining, but on the contrary, treated each other as infidels, atheists and damnable heretics *. Whilst so many reverend divines were abusing each other, and making farther divisions in the Christian Church, Mr. Firmin, a private person and a tradesman, endeavoured to the best of his abilities to promote peace and unity.

Those who warmly contended for a Trinity of persons in the Deity, yet differed greatly from one another about the meaning of the term person. Whilst some

* Tindal's Continuation of Rapin, vol. III. page, 520, 21. and Burnet's History of his own Times.

say that three divine persons are three minds, spirits, substances and beings, eternal, infinite &c. others reject this as heresy, blasphemy and tritheism. To reconcile the doctrine of the Trinity with the perfect unity of God, has perplexed the learned exceedingly; and various have been the phrases and terms, which they have adopted. The unscriptural expressions made use of in these debates, the Unitarians disapproved; but they thought, that, notwithstanding the learned had so greatly perplexed themselves and their readers, the things intended by these terms were in fact agreeable to their sentiments, or at least that they might be allowed to use them in their own sense. Such was the advantage which the Unitarians made of the disputes amongst their adversaries, whose quarrels gave birth to the *Agreement between the Unitarians and the Catholic Church*; a book which was written chiefly at the instance of Mr. Firmin, in answer to several Trinitarian writers, who had charged his party with heresy. After this treatise had been examined and corrected, it was published by Mr. Firmin, and that with more satisfaction than ever

he had felt in sending forth the many controversial writings, which his sincere love of truth had induced him to spread abroad in the world *. It is not to be wondered at, that a person of Mr. Firmin's disposition, should be so ready to embrace a reconciliation with the Church. He was ever a lover of peace, and always conformed as far as he could, according to that direction of the Apostle's, "Whereunto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule;" which he, with many learned interpreters understood thus, "conform to the doctrines, terms and usages that are commonly received as far as you can; if in some things you differ from the Church, yet agree with her and walk by her rule, to the utmost that in conscience you may." From this principle it was, that he never approved of a separation from the Church, merely on account of ceremonies, habits, forms of government, or any of the bare circumstantialia of religion; and persuaded many to conform, who objected nothing more to the establishment than such things as these †.

Christians should undoubtedly "study

* Life, page 20.

† Life, page 21,

"the

“ the things which make for peace” but if the best and most effectual way to restore peace, be to restore religion to its original simplicity and purity, those seem to pursue the properest method, who refuse to join, as stated worshippers, with any Church whatsoever, which imposes unscriptural terms of conformity either on ministers or people. Those who peaceably dissent from establishments, and persuade others to do so, may be as desirous of unity and concord as those who comply with them, and think they are pursuing a method most agreeable to the integrity required by the Gospel. But though Mr. Firmin laid no stress on forms, and ceremonies, many, perhaps, will wonder, how he, being a Socinian, or, as it has been said, an Arian *, could conform.

* Dr. Birch asserts this in his *Life of Archbishop Tillotson*, page 320. I suppose on the authority of *Bishop Burnet's History of his own Times*, vol. III. page 292. Whether Bishop Burnet heard Mr. Firmin explain himself on this head, or received such an account from some other hand he hath not told us. In all probability he was mistaken. The books which Mr. Firmin distributed, favoured the Socinian scheme, which seems to have been adopted by all the Unitarians of that age. The Arians were hardly ever spoken of.

conform to the Church in its worship. Much dexterity must certainly be necessary, to reconcile the Athanasian creed with the belief of the perfect unity and absolute unrivalled supremacy of the One God; and still more to justify the offering up distinct prayers to three persons, when he, who uses these forms, means to address one person only. Besides, the constant repetition of these terms and phrases must necessarily lead the greater part of mankind into sentiments and ideas very opposite to those which the Unitarian adopts concerning the Deity. How, then, can a sincere lover of truth reconcile himself to the use of them? To all this it may be replied, with respect to Mr. Firmin, that his case was a very particular one. It does not appear that any Unitarian society was kept up after the death of Mr. Biddle. The dissenters of that age were not only Trinitarians, but likewise in general more attached to the Calvinistical doctrines than the clergy, most of whom indeed rejected them.

of in England till Dr. Clarke and Mr. Whiston were charged with reviving doctrines similar to those, which had been of old maintained by Arius and his followers.

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The Quakers, besides renouncing the positive ordinances of christianity, were then very enthusiastical. Mr. Firmin was, therefore, under the disagreeable necessity of attending no public worship at all, or of joining where forms were used, and doctrines delivered, to which he had material objections. No wonder then that he endeavoured to reconcile himself to the use of some improper terms and expressions, rather than be deprived of all the pleasures of social devotion. Had he lived in these days, there is great reason to suppose, that he would have joined in communion with some of those private societies, where forms and expressions merely of human invention are exploded, and the one God and Father of all is worshipped through the one Mediator Jesus Christ, in whose name the assistance of the Blessed Spirit of grace and truth is humbly implored. Several clergymen, of most respectable and worthy characters, have within these few years thought it their duty to resign their preferments, rather than continue to join in forms which their consciences disapproved; and certainly this is acting a worthy
and

and upright part*. Mr. Firmin pursued the course which he thought best, unbiaſſed by any regard to his private interest, or the apprehension of being thought ſingular. Thoſe worldly conſiderations, which have great weight with many, had none with him. He was never aſhamed of the Goſpel of Chriſt, nor of thoſe ſentiments, which he had formed concerning it ; but he ever avowed and did his beſt to ſupport and countenance them.

But though, by taking advantage of the explanations, which ſome great divines had given of the Trinitarian doctrine, he thought he might venture to profeſs himſelf to be really of the ſame mind with the Catholic Church, and the Church of England, yet he reſolved to continue his endeavours, “ That no falſe notion of the Tri-
 “ nity ſhould corrupt the ſincere faith of
 “ the Unity. He was perſuaded that the ar-
 “ ticle of the Unity is the firſt article of
 “ Chriſtianity, the article that diſtinguiſhes
 “ Chriſtians from Pagans : as the belief

* The names of Robertſon, Lindſey, Jebb, and Evanſon are well known, nor are theſe the only ones who have lately from motives of pure conſcience left the eſtabliſhed church.

“ of the Messiah already come distin-
 “ guishes us from the Jews. He judged
 “ that though the unscriptural terms Tri-
 “ nity, three divine persons, and such
 “ like, in the sense they are intended by
 “ the Church, contain a doctrine which
 “ is true; yet taken in the sense they
 “ bear in common familiar speech, in
 “ which sense the greater number of
 “ men (almost all the unlearned) must
 “ needs understand them; they imply
 “ a more gross and absurd polytheism,
 “ than any of the old heathens were
 “ guilty of. He that understands three
 “ Divine Persons to be three (distinct,
 “ infinite, all perfect) spirits or beings,
 “ or minds, three creators, three several
 “ objects of worship, is more guilty of
 “ polytheism, than the Greeks or Romans
 “ ever were before their conversion to
 “ Christianity. For though they and
 “ other nations were heathens, that is
 “ polytheists, asserters of more gods;
 “ yet they never believed more than one
 “ infinite, all perfect spirit, the father
 “ and king of the lesser deities. Mr.
 “ Firmin knew well that the majority of
 “ vulgar christians, and not a few lear-
 “ ed men, have tritheistic notions or
 conception

“ conceptions of the Trinity or three Di-
 “ vine Persons each of which is God:
 “ namely, that they are three distinct,
 “ infinite, all perfect minds or spirits.
 “ Meeting this every day in conversation
 “ as well as in books, he was not less
 “ zealous for the doctrine of the Unity
 “ after the publication of the scheme of
 “ agreement than before ; and therefore
 “ he proposed, besides the continuation of
 “ his former efforts, to hold assemblies
 “ for divine worship, distinct from the
 “ assemblies of any other denomination
 “ of christians. But he did not intend
 “ these assemblies or congregations by
 “ way of schism or separation from the
 “ Church ; but only as *Fraternities in the*
 “ *Church*, who would undertake a more
 “ especial care of that article, for the
 “ sake of which it is certain both the
 “ Testaments were written. The great
 “ design and scope of both Testaments, and
 “ the reason that they were given by
 “ God, was to regain mankind to the
 “ belief and acknowledgment of but one
 “ God ; to destroy polytheism of all sorts.
 “ Mr. Firmin intended to recommend it
 “ to the Unitarian congregations, as the
 “ very reason of their distinct assembling ;
 “ to

“ to be particularly mindful of, and
 “ zealous for, the article of the Unity, to
 “ cause it to be so explained in their as-
 “ semblies, catechisms and books (with-
 “ out denying or so much as suppressing
 “ the catholic doctrine of the Trinity)
 “ that all men might easily and readily
 “ know in what sense the Unity of God
 “ is to be believed, and the mystery of a
 “ Trinity of Divine Persons (each of
 “ them God) is to be interpreted. Mr.
 “ Firmin feared that without such as-
 “ semblies, the continual use of terms,
 “ which in their ordinary signification
 “ are confessed by all to imply three
 “ Gods, would paganize at some time
 “ the whole Christian Church *.

This plan of Mr. Firmin's did not
 take place, for he died before it could
 well be put into execution. Many per-
 haps will be of opinion, that it was by
 no means a sufficient protest against the
 use of phrases, which were thought to
 have so direct a tendency to lead men
 into the belief of a doctrine, which sub-
 verted that important article the Unity
 of God. A total separation from all

* An account of Mr. Firmin's religion annexed
 to his Life, page 50. 51.

churches,

churches, where such forms are used, seems to be the duty of every Unitarian; especially if he live in a place where a Unitarian society is or may be set on foot. Those, who separate from an establishment, may still be joined in affection and love to all its sincere and pious members; for surely the warmest charity may, and oftentimes does subsist, between those who worship in different places, and make use of different forms. A unity of sounds in the bonds of ignorance, or a unity of practice in the bonds of hypocrisy, is by no means desirable. To promote a unity of spirit in the bonds of peace should be the endeavour of all the sincere inquirers after truth; and such a unity will be most likely to subsist between those, who, however they may differ from one another, are all impartial and upright in their researches.

Mr. Firmin, besides his attachment to Mr. Biddle, evidenced in the early part of his life a generous regard for those who suffered on account of their Unitarian opinions. It was in the year 1658, when he was a very young man, that the Unitarians were banished from Poland. Those who, about the time of the Reformation,

formation, first began to have doubts concerning the doctrine of the Trinity, were some learned and inquisitive persons in the state of Venice, who held meetings where they conversed with freedom on religious subjects. Some of these by the vigilance of the Popish emissaries were seized and put to death, others fled to different countries, and Lælius Socinus, who was born of a most noble family, betook himself to Poland, and having instilled his sentiments into the queen's confessor, who defended them in writing, they were adopted by several learned men. This was about the year 1558, and long before the celebrated Faustus Socinus * visited that kingdom. As the Socinians increased in numbers and reputation, many privileges were granted to them about the year 1600, and several flourishing societies were formed, protected, and countenanced by persons of the highest rank. After having en-

* Such as are desirous of knowing, what was the real character, and what were the real sentiments of that noted man, may obtain full satisfaction from the very accurate and impartial account which Mr Toulmin hath given in his "Memoirs of the Life, Character, Sentiments and Writings of Faustus Socinus."

joyed

joyed honour and security for nearly threescore years, and distinguished themselves not a little by their many learned writings, a decree was made, and an edict issued out, by which all Unitarians, who would not embrace the Roman Catholic religion, were banished out of Poland, two years being however allowed them to sell their estates and effects *.

The Unitarians upon this left Poland and settled, some in Transylvania, where they had many friends, and others, in different places. Amongst these were many poor persons; and, therefore, such of the nobility and gentry, as were of that persuasion, not being able in this persecuted state, to relieve the wants of their suffering brethren, applied for help to all the Unitarian churches in foreign parts. They knew, that in England a few families only had imbibed these sentiments; yet they sent a letter to entreat assistance; and Mr. Firmin procured contributions from some whom he knew to be well affected to them. And though no brief was granted, collections were made in a few of the churches, which

* Life of Mr. Firmin, page 23.

evidenced a liberality of mind, in those who encouraged them, very seldom to be met with in that age of bigotry. Mr. Firmin possessed this generosity of soul in an eminent degree. It was without doubt natural for him to assist the persecuted Unitarians; but about twenty years after, he had an opportunity of giving a remarkable proof of the unbounded extent of his charity.

In 1681, King Charles granted a brief to another sort of Polonian sufferers, who also were Protestants. They had permitted the Unitarians to be banished, when it would have been effectually prevented, had but one of their deputies protested against it in the Diet (or general assembly of the states) for perfect unanimity is indispensably necessary amongst the Poles to render any decree valid. The other Protestants thus willingly permitted, and even promoted that edict by which the Unitarians were sentenced to banishment, and the natural consequence of the loss of so large and respectable a body was the weakening the reformed interest to such a degree as enabled the Papists almost effectually to ruin it. The Calvinists and Lutherans would not have lost
their

their liberty and their country, had they not voted themselves out of both, when they consented to the persecution of the Unitarians; for the various sects, when united, formed too strong a party for the Papists to meddle with.

Mr. Firmin, however, exerted himself to give them support under their troubles; and, as if he had forgotten the former injury which they had done his friends, or rather, influenced by that excellent precept of the Gospel, not to render evil for evil, but to do good even to an enemy when in necessity, he kindly assisted these persecuted persecutors. The sum of five hundred and sixty-eight pounds was paid in to him upon that account, besides one hundred and ten pounds, being the contribution of nine dissenting congregations *. It was much to the honour of the dissenters, that they were thus disposed to assist foreign sufferers, when they themselves had been so severely harrassed and persecuted, and their liberty was so precarious. What enabled them to bear those great expenses which they sustained by the ejection

* Life, page 26.

tion of their ministers, and the heavy fines, which were from time to time laid both upon them and their hearers, was their extraordinary frugality and prudence. They loved the interest of religion, and dedicated to the service of that what their posterity seem most inclined to devote to expensive fashions and amusements, a prevailing love of which will effectually suppress and eradicate every noble, generous, and manly sentiment of the human heart.

Thus various and impartial, extensive and liberal were Mr. Firmin's charities. It may well be supposed that only the most striking particulars of an active life, almost entirely devoted to benevolent purposes, could be recorded. There is, however, one instance more of his goodness, which deserves particular mention. When the money was called in, and there was a very great scarcity of current coin, that he might be able to continue his former charities, at a time when they were more needful than ever, he lessened his own expenses by laying down his coach *. This, considering his noble

* Life, page 77.

connections, and the vast business which required his attendance at different places, was no small sacrifice. If the admiration of the Reader be excited on a review of so many acts of true and disinterested benevolence, may that admiration tend to cherish in his breast the same godlike dispositions!

C H A P.

C H A P. VI.

Mr. Firmin's Sickness and Death. He is attended in his last Illness by Bishop Fowler, of whom a short Account is given. The Respect paid to Mr. Firmin's Memory by Lady Clayton. Reflections on his Character, with some Extracts from a Sermon preached on Occasion of his Decease.

THE shortness of human life has been a frequent subject of complaint; and those whose vices have inclined them to infidelity, and disposed them to seek for arguments, which might serve to excuse their contempt of religion, have alledged this as a reason against the doctrine of Providence. But it is a high degree of folly and presumption to argue in this manner: we are very incompetent judges of what in this case is right and fit. We may be assured that the period allotted to us by the great Giver of life is fully sufficient for our performing all that he expects we should do. A short
G existence

existence in this state is too long for those who are bent on wicked courses; mankind have no reason to wish for their stay in it. A life of labour and toil, of pain and sorrow, which falls to the lot of many, cannot be very desirable. And with respect to the benevolent and virtuous, who are blessings to their friends and to society, they are convinced that God expects them to do no more good in the world, when he sees fit to take them out of it; and they have no cause to repine at being soon called to receive the reward of their labours. Mankind, when they lament the loss of such, ought not to reflect upon the Divine Wisdom, but learn to be wise themselves; for there would not be so much cause to lament the removal of the good, if more would learn to imitate their worthy actions.

Dear and valuable as Mr. Firmin's life was, yet it could not reasonably be expected, that it should extend much beyond the common period allotted to mortality; and, if those who loved him, fondly indulged such a hope, they were greatly disappointed, for he did not reach seventy. His constitution was naturally strong and firm; but he had greatly weakened it by
a constant

a constant and unremitting attention to his many and various charitable employments. He seemed to have adopted the maxims of the excellent Bishop Cumberland, who lived to be eighty-seven, and could not, even in his very last month, be dissuaded from undertaking fatigues though superior to his strength, his answer and resolution was, "I will do my duty as long as I can:" and when his friends represented to him, that so much study and labour would injure his health, his usual reply was, "A man had better wear out, than rust out."

"Mr. Firmin was sometimes liable to jaundices, often afflicted with cholics, and was scarcely ever without a cough, for his lungs had been long ptyfical. He would often return home so tired and depressed in his spirits, that his pulse were scarcely to be felt, or very languid; and he would then take a little rest in his chair, but soon start up out of it and appear very lively in company, especially where any good was to be done. The more immediate cause of his death was a fever which seized his spirits, beginning with a chillness and shivering, and then a heat ensued. He

“ was at the same time afflicted both in
 “ his lungs, with a great shortness of
 “ breath, not having strength to expecto-
 “ rate, and also with such terrible pains
 “ in his bowels that for many hours
 “ nothing could be made to pass through
 “ him. He had also for many years been
 “ troubled with a large rupture, all
 “ which made his sickness very short. He
 “ had wished in his lifetime that he
 “ might not lie above two days on a
 “ dying bed ; God granted to him his
 “ desire, he lay not so long by eight hours,
 “ and December 20th, about two of the
 “ o’clock in the morning, anno dom. 1697,
 “ he died.”

During his last illness, he was visited
 by his most dear friend Bishop Fowler ;
 but on account of the extreme violence
 of his pains, he could hold but little con-
 verse with him. What did pass between
 them his Lordship made known under
 his own hand, and was as follows. “ Mr.
 “ Firmin told me he was now going :
 “ and I trust,” said he, “ God will not
 “ condemn me to worse company than I
 “ have loved and used in the present life.”
 I replied, “ That he had been an extra-
 “ ordinary example of charity, the poor
 “ had

“ had a wonderful blessing in you: I
 “ doubt not these works will follow you,
 “ if you have no expectation from the
 “ merit of them, but rely on the infinite
 “ goodness of God, and the merits of our
 “ Saviour.” Here he answered “ I do so:
 “ and I say in the words of my Saviour,
 “ *When I have done all, I am but an unpro-*
 “ *fitable servant.* He was in such an agony
 “ of body for want of breath, that I did
 “ not think fit to speak more to him, but
 “ only to give him assurance of my earn-
 “ est prayers for him, while he remained
 “ in this world. Then I took a solemn
 “ and affectionate farewell of him, and he
 “ of me *.”

“ It

* Bishop Fowler was a man well deserving particu-
 lar notice in a life of Mr. Firmin*. He was born in
 the year 1632, at Westerleigh in Gloucestershire, and
 received his grammar learning at the college school
 in Gloucester. In 1650, he became clerk of Corpus
 Christi College in Oxford, of which he was admitted
 as a chaplain three years after, being very ready and
 fluent in extemporary prayer. On Bartholomew
 day, 1662, he was ejected from the rectory of North-
 all in Bedfordshire, to which he had been presented
 by the Countess of Kent †. However, not being will-
 ing to lie in silence and obscurity, he endeavoured to

* Life, page 81—3.

† Nonconformist's Memorial, vol. I. page 225.

“ It is usual to conclude lives with a
 “ character of the persons, both as to
 “ their bodies and the qualities of their
 “ minds : therefore I must further add.
 “ Mr. Firmin was of a low stature, well
 “ proportioned ; his complexion fair and
 “ bright ;

conquer his scruples ; and after a while, having reconciled himself to the imposed terms, he conformed and became a great ornament to the church. His father, who was eminent both for ministerial abilities and labours, and his brother, who had a valuable living of three hundred pounds per ann. and shortened his days by a close application to study, were both ejected at the same time *, and could never bring their consciences to submit to the act of uniformity. But it does not appear that ever they censured him, who did comply : nor had they cause, men of equal learning, piety, and integrity may see the same thing in different lights. Mr. Fowler having distinguished himself by some excellent moral writings, Archbishop Sheldon was desirous of introducing him to the metropolis of the kingdom ; and, therefore, in August 1673, gave him the rectory of All-hallows, Bread-Street. In 1675, he was made prebendary of Gloucester ; and in March 1681, vicar of St. Giles, Cripplegate.

In this respectable situation he made himself very obnoxious to the court and its adherents, by his strenuous opposition to Popery. Some of his parishioners also, in order to recommend themselves to the higher powers, commenced an ill-natured prosecution against

* Nonconformist's Memorial, vol. I. page 549.
 and vol. II. page 218.

“ bright; his eye and countenance lively,
 “ his aspect manly and promising some-
 “ what extraordinary, so that a stranger
 “ might readily take him for a man of
 “ good sense, worth, and dignity. Walk-
 “ ing or sitting he appeared more comely
 “ than

him; alledging that he was guilty of Whiggism, and that he admitted to the communion excommunicated persons, before they were absolved; and the matter being tried at Doctor's Commons, he was suspended. This affront, however, did not intimidate him; for he went on in the resolute performance of his duty, and was the second who signed the resolution, into which many of the London clergy entered, not to read King James's declaration for liberty of conscience. On account of this and his excellent writings, which did honour to the church and nation; he was preferred by King William, in 1691, to the See of Gloucester, in which he continued till his death, in August 1714, having reached his 82d year *.

Bishop Fowler had the cause of rational piety and practical religion much at heart; and he thought the main design of Christianity was to promote real holiness. He was no zealot for mere outward forms; and exposed himself to the rage of furious bigots, by writing in defence of those divines, who were then styled Latitudinarians. Those who were thus denominated, were accused of Socinianism, Atheism, &c. for no other reason than their explaining some doctrines in a manner less mysterious than had been usual amongst divines, and also because they were ready to sacrifice

* Biographical Dictionary, Article Fowler.

“ than standing still; for his mien and
 “ action gave a gracefulness to his person.
 “ The endowments, inclinations, and
 “ qualities of his mind, the reader may
 “ form a judgment of from the account
 “ which hath been given of his life. It
 “ appears that he was quick of apprehension and dispatch, and yet almost indefatigably industrious, properties that
 “ very rarely meet in the same man. He
 “ was besides inquisitive and very ingenious, he had a thirst after knowledge,
 “ and the quickness of his understanding
 “ enabled him to acquire it in a large degree, with but little labour. He could
 “ not dissemble; on the contrary, his
 “ love or anger, his liking or dislike,
 “ might be easily perceived. In both these
 “ respects he was rather too open, but openness is the effect of sincerity and the argument of an honest mind. He never
 “ proudly affected the notice of others,

a few ceremonies and rites, confessedly indifferent in their nature, rather than exclude from the church many excellent persons, who scrupled to submit to the imposition of them. Bishop Fowler was a learned advocate for the doctrine of the Trinity. The mutual esteem between him and Mr. Firmin arose from the warm love which they both had for real piety and goodness wherever found.

“ whether

“ whether above or below him, which
 “ seems a good proof that his charities
 “ did not proceed from any affectation of
 “ honour or glory amongst men, but from
 “ the love of God, and his afflicted brother.
 “ He was naturally facetious, but he
 “ valued judgment rather than wit. He
 “ was neither presuming or over bold,
 “ nor yet timorous; a little prone to an-
 “ ger, but never excessive in it either as
 “ to measure or time. Being well assured
 “ in himself of his own integrity, he
 “ heard without uneasiness the calumnies
 “ which some malicious persons had pro-
 “ pagated concerning him, only he was
 “ sorry that men should be so wicked and
 “ rash as to invent or report falsehoods and
 “ lies merely to gratify a malignant or
 “ envious disposition *.”

He had often signified, that it was his
 desire to be buried in Christ Church
 Hospital, the interests of which charitable
 institution he appeared to have much at
 heart when living. In compliance with
 this his desire, he was interred in the
 cloysters of that Hospital, and his relatives

* Life, p. 83,—4. The above quotation is not
 strictly literal, a few alterations were made with a view
 to convey the same sense the more clearly.

erected a marble to his memory, with the following inscription.

UNDER that stone, near this place, lyeth the body of Thomas Firmin, late Citizen of London, a Governour of this and St. Thomas's Hospital; who by the Grace of God, was created in Christ Jesus unto good works, wherein he was indefatigably industrious, and successfully provoked many others thereto, becoming also their Almoner, visiting and relieving the Poor at their Houses, and in prisons, whence also he redeemed many. He set many hundreds of them at work, to the expending of great stocks: he rebuilt, repaired, and added conveniences to Hospitals, weekly overseeing the Orphans. The Refugees from France, and from Ireland, have partaken largely, the effects of his Charity, Pains, and earnest Solicitations for them. He was wonderfully Zealous in every good Work, beyond the Example of any in our age. Thus shewed he his Faith by his Works, and cannot reasonably be reproached for that which brought forth such plenty of Good Fruits.

*He died Dec. 20, 1697, and in the 66th year of his Age *.*

* Life, p. 89, 90.

Lady

Lady Clayton had so great a respect for his memory, that, with the concurrence of Sir Robert, she erected a handsome monument in their garden at Marden in Surry, in a walk called *Mr. Firmin's Walk*, he being the person who had planned it. This monument is a marble pillar, about eight feet high, with an urn and flowers growing out of the top of it, with this motto, *Florescit funere virtus*. there is also a marble table fixed to one side of the pillar, with the following inscription.

To perpetuate (as far as Marble and Love can do it) the Memory of Thomas Firmin Citizen of London.

None ever passed the several periods of Human Life more irreproachably, or perform'd the common Duties of Society with greater sincerity and approbation. Though it appears, by his public spirit, that he thought himself born rather for the Benefit of others, than his own private Advantage; yet the satisfaction of doing Good, and the universal esteem of honest men, made him the happiest person in the world. But his Charity (which was not confined
to

to any Nation, Sect, or Party) is most worthy thy Imitation, at least in some Degree, O Reader ! He was as liberal of his own, as faithful in distributing the pious Donations of others whom he successfully persuaded to relieve the distressed, particularly the laborious poor ; for of vagrant, idle, and insolent Beggars, he was no advocate nor encourager. His agreeable Temper rendered him an extraordinary lover of Gardens, he contrived this Walk, which bears his Name, and where his improving Conversation and Example are still remembered. But since Heaven has better disposed of him, this Pillar is erected to Charity and Friendship by Sir Robert Clayton, and Martha his Lady, who first builded and planted in Marden.

Born at Ipswich, in Suffolk.

Buried in Christ Church Hospital London.

Gardening was the amusement in which Mr. Firmin chiefly delighted. The author of his life says “ He cultivated a piece of ground at Hoxton, not a mile from London, where he raised flowers, and in time attained no small skill in the art of gardening, in the culture of flowers, herbs, greens, and
“ fruit

“ fruit trees of all sorts. I have often
 “ borne him company to his garden; but
 “ either going, or coming back, he used
 “ often to visit the poor and sick: this
 “ was one of Mr. Biddle’s lessons, that
 “ it is a duty not only to relieve, but
 “ to visit the sick and poor; because
 “ they are hereby encouraged and com-
 “ forted, and we come to know more of
 “ what nature and degree their straits
 “ are, and that some are more worthy
 “ of assistance than others; and their con-
 “ dition being known, sometimes we are
 “ able to assist them by our counsel, or
 “ our interest, much more effectually
 “ than by the charity we do or can be-
 “ stow upon them *.

“ Such were the general endeavours and
 “ performances of Mr. Firmin’s life.
 “ The particulars under each general
 “ head were so numerous, that to relate
 “ them all would perhaps tire both the
 “ Reader and the Writer. We have taken
 “ a view, though but an imperfect one, of
 “ a person of middle extraction and flen-
 “ der beginnings, who raised himself to
 “ the honour of a very great number of

* Life, p. 10.

“ illustrious friendships, and to an afflu-
 “ ence of worldly wealth; to which
 “ when he had attained by industry,
 “ integrity, and worth, like our Saviour,
 “ he went about doing good. In respect
 “ of his endeavours in all kinds of cha-
 “ rity, he may deservedly be called *the*
 “ *Father of the Poor*, and with regard to
 “ the Irish and French refugees, *the Almo-*
 “ *ner of England*. The Divine hand had
 “ qualified him to do much good, him-
 “ self sought out the objects and occa-
 “ sions for it, and delighted in the work.
 “ And he did it with so much diligence
 “ and application that he might even
 “ have said with our Saviour, *my meat is*
 “ *to do the will of him that sent me; and*
 “ *to finish his Work*.

“ The Jesuit, who assisted the late fa-
 “ mous Marshal Luxemburgh in his last
 “ hours, thought he might well put this
 “ question to him: Well, Sir, tell me,
 “ had you not rather now to have given
 “ one alms to a poor man, in his distress
 “ for God’s sake, than to have won so
 “ many victories in the field of battle?
 “ the Marshal confessed he should now
 “ choose the former, seeing nothing will
 “ avail any man, in the eternal world,
 “ but

“ but only the actions of charity, or
 “ of justice and piety. The confessor
 “ doth not seem to have been imperti-
 “ nent in the question; for in our serious
 “ last hours we shall all be sensible,
 “ and be likewise ready to confess, that
 “ we were wise only in that part of our
 “ life which was laid out in the duties
 “ either of humanity towards men, or
 “ piety towards God. The Cræsi and
 “ Cræsi, the Hannibals and Luxemburghs,
 “ the most conspicuous for wealth or mi-
 “ litary glory, how gladly would they in
 “ their expiring moments, exchange all the
 “ fruits of their ambition, for some part
 “ of our Firmin’s toil and labour for the
 “ poor, and the deserving. Is it for
 “ want of *faith* or of *consideration*, that
 “ we are so better pleased with read-
 “ ing the acts of the Alexanders, the
 “ Charlemains, and other false heroes,
 “ than those of persons who have been
 “ exemplary for justice, beneficence or
 “ devotion, and are now triumphant in
 “ heaven on the account of those services
 “ to God and to men? but so it is, either
 “ because we are not *Christians* or be-
 “ cause we are, *fools*; we are, commonly
 “ speaking,

“ speaking, better pleased with the sons of
 “ earth than of heaven *.”

It is to be hoped, that the Readers of Mr. Firmin’s life, whoever they may be, will learn to value and to imitate so exalted a character, and be confirmed and strengthened in the best and worthiest dispositions, especially in humanity, and charity. Mr. Firmin affords the best example on record to young tradesmen. Such may learn what vast service one of but small fortune was capable of doing, by striving to merit the acquaintance of such persons of rank and eminence as were enabled and disposed to do good. Many, who have sufficient wealth to render them extensively and eminently useful to their fellow creatures, would be really so, did some active persons of known ability and integrity stir them up to it by their examples and sollicitations: Mr. Firmin was a great master of the art of persuasion. He possessed a considerable degree of prudence as well as wit and address, and knew how to choose the *mollia tempora fandi*, the fittest seasons for speaking, and when he spoke, he ap-

* Life, p. 77,—9, the quotation is not quite literal.
 plied

plied himself to those passions of the person whom he solicited which could most effectually be wrought upon. He once went to ask a citizen of the highest rank, for his charity towards rebuilding St. Thomas's hospital, and petitioned him for no less than one hundred pounds. This citizen having been some way or other disobliged by the governors of the hospital, refused to subscribe any thing. But Mr. Firmin seeing him one day in company with some friends, whom he respected, and by whom he was willing to be respected, and also finding that he was in a very good humour, he again renewed his request, and by this well timed application obtained the whole sum which he had desired*. To his personal solicitations he was sometimes forced to add letters; and frequently succeeded best by the arguments there made use of. It appears, by one of his books, dated 1679, that he had received the sum of five hundred and twenty pounds from seventy-two persons, and in the year 1681, the sum of five hundred and thirty-two pounds from forty-three

* Life, p. 47.

persons. All these were to be treated with privately, as opportunity offered; which required much time, caution, industry and discretion, which laid out on his own business must have been of vast private advantage. Mr. Firmin might much more easily have been one of the great men of the world, than almoner general for the poor and the hospitals *. Thus it was, that, though he was a great master of the art of persuasion, his actions always spoke with more eloquence and force than his words: and as he never thought any thing, which he could say or do, was too much, when charity was the subject, he met with uncommon success in his applications. But lessons of benevolence and humanity are not the only ones which we may learn from a review of Mr. Firmin's character. What was it which made him so active, so useful, and so exemplary? it was a principle of religion. The feelings, natural to the human heart, may excite a man to relieve a distressed object, who appears in view; but to be incessantly seeking out for such, and labouring for

* Life p. 48.

their good, to sacrifice not only riches, but also many of the comforts of life, to waste the strength and health in the service of strangers and foreigners, these are actions which clearly prove that the mind is actuated by religious motives. And what religion is so well adapted to render a man unwearied in well doing as the religion of Jesus? and what more excellent definition can be given of religion than that which we have in one of the sacred writers? *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the Fatherless and Widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world* *. The excellent nature and happy tendency of this religion Mr. Firmin understood and felt; and he was unwearied in his endeavours to promote the knowledge of it in its purity and the practice of it in its fullest extent. And what but a secret love to vice, of some one vice at least, or a most unaccountable turn of mind can render any person, who loves his fellow creatures, an enemy to the Gospel of Jesus Christ? this Gospel contains the most excellent rules;

* James, i. 27.

it sets before us the most perfect example; and the rewards which are promised to a patient continuance in well-doing, afford the most powerful motives which can be offered, to raise in the human heart the warmest regard to every thing great and noble. The characters, which have been formed upon the Gospel model, will appear upon examination to have been the most uniformly good and useful which have ever been exhibited to the world. And the review of such a character as Mr. Firmin's cannot fail of exciting in every virtuous mind, an increasing love and reverence for that religion, which laid the foundation of so many worthy and generous deeds.

If any, who read his life, should be inclined to think unfavourably of Mr. Firmin on account of his religious sentiments, (which on some controverted points, were very different from those contained in the creeds and confessions generally styled orthodox) let them only lay aside their prejudices in favour of a particular system, and they will see and acknowledge his worth. Some, who style themselves ministers of the Gospel of peace,

peace, will yet take upon them in most of their public discourses, rashly to condemn those, who cannot assent to their explanations on doubtful and mysterious points. By this means many serious and well disposed persons are led to think unfavourably, and to speak harshly of those, who differ from them. It is to be lamented that the men, who are zealous for controverted doctrines, about which there have been almost endless disputes, should at the same time be forgetful of this plain precept of their Redeemer, *Judge not that ye be not judged* *. Such may very properly be asked in the language of the Apostle Paul, *Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth* †. If men bring forth the fruits of righteousness in their conduct and behaviour, how dare we to call in question the sincerity of their faith? This is setting up ourselves for judges of the heart, which is the sole prerogative of God. We may be assured, that He, being infinitely wise and good, though He may not see fit to guard his creatures against every mistake, yet will

* Mat. vii. 1. † Rom. xiv. 4.

not suffer those, who appear sincerely desirous of knowing and doing his will to fall into any fatal error *. A little acquaintance with the history of religion, and with the worthy characters of persons differing from each other in speculative

* Very pertinent to this matter are the sentiments contained in a sermon occasioned by the death of Mr. Firmin, and affixed to his Life. It appears from the title page to have been preached in the country ; but where, or by whom, it is not said. In all probability it was delivered to some little private society of Unitarians, who might perhaps have ventured to hold one secret meeting, that they might stir up each other to imitate the exuplencies of their departed friend, who had done their cause so much honour, and who was worthy of general imitation. Happy no doubt would they have thought themselves, if the spirit of the times had permitted their more publicly assembling. The text was very suitable to the occasion ; Luke, x. 36, 37. *Which of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour to him that fell among the thieves? He answered, he that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus, go and do thou likewise.* On these words the preacher made a number of useful and practical observations, of which the following may not be improperly quoted. “ The cause of so great an aversion and displeasure “ between the Samaritans and Jews, was difference “ of religion. The Samaritans owned only the first “ five books of Holy Scripture, namely the books “ written by Moses. As to the prophets, the books “ of Solomon, the Psalms of David, Job, the books “ of Kings and Chronicles, Nehemiah, Ezra, Ruth, “ Esther : these they received not as *divine books.* “ There

lative points, will tend to banish all narrow prejudices from the pious and good of every denomination, and they will learn to love one another with a pure heart fervently. Heaven is large enough to contain all the sincere friends of truth and

“ There is no doubt that, in these matters, the Samaritans were to blame, and were in the wrong; the Jews had the advantage in all points that were controverted between them and the Samaritans. Nay farther, the Samaritans mistook even about the object of worship, God. Their notions or apprehensions of God, seem to have been confused and uncertain. They are the words of our Saviour, John iv. 22. *Ye (ye Samaritans) know not what ye worship; we (we Jews) know what we worship.* The error then of the Samaritans consisted, not only in refusing diverse books, belonging to the Old Testament, but their conceptions or opinions concerning God were not clear or true. Ye know not, says our Saviour, what ye worship; that is, ye know not God: some knowledge ye have of him, but ye know him not rightly: it is an obscure, confused, and for the most part of it, a mistaken knowledge that ye have of him.

“ Of this nation, and of this religion, was the person whom our text so much commends. This is he of whom our Saviour says here, he was the true neighbour; the person whom the law of God intends when it says, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* He was not a Jew, that is, he was not of the true church of God: he owned but a small part of Holy Scriptures, disowning the far greater part of the Divine Word. His knowledge of the
“ object

and virtue; and however such may differ in lesser matters, their views are all directed to the same end, and they are all going to the same place. Mr. Firmin thus humble, though at the same time with a rational confidence, expressed his

“ object of worship, of God, was so imperfect, uncertain and confused, that our Saviour himself pronounces, the men of that religion knew not God. But with all these infelicities he was a doer of good, a lover of men, adorned with beneficent, charitable principles. Not carried away by the common and general example, whether of the Samaritans or Jews, to hate others merely for their religion; open handed and well affected to men as men. Such a one, says our Saviour in this text, is to be accounted a neighbour, he belongs to that charge and law of God, *thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. A Levite, or Priest, though he is a minister of God Most High, may less deserve the benefit of that law; he may not have so good a claim to it, as a man of a *far country*, and *another religion*; the good man, the doer of good, is that person who only can challenge it as his right, to be loved as ourselves. Give me leave to make these few short remarks hereupon.

1st. “ Our most blessed Saviour prefers here the Samaritan before the Levite, and the Priest; the doer of good before the man of right faith or true opinions: the reason is a man’s faith, his right sect or way of religion, why, it is a desirable thing, a valuable felicity; but it does good to nobody but to the person himself. If I hold the true religion in all respects, so as not to mistake so much as in one
“ point :

his hopes of happiness in his expiring moments ; “ I trust (said he) that God
 “ will not condemn me to worse com-
 “ pany than I have loved and used in the
 “ present life.” His delight had been in
 the company and converse of the excel-
 lent

“ point: what is the world, what is my neighbour
 “ the better for my great and exact knowledge and
 “ skill? But if, like the Samaritan in this text, I am
 “ a lover of men, a doer of good, open handed; or
 “ if I cannot do so, yet open hearted; a great many
 “ others one time or other shall be the better for this.
 “ We cannot reasonably wonder that God esteems a
 “ virtue which is useful to many, before a right faith, or
 “ true knowledge, which are not a common and gene-
 “ ral good, as the doing of good is.

“ 2d. Again I take notice, it is not indeed in every
 “ one’s powers to do, as this Samaritan, to relieve the
 “ poor or distressed in their wants, or to encourage the
 “ worthy and deserving in their excellent endeavours.
 “ But though few of us have the Samaritan’s purse, all
 “ may, and should, have his spirit. We can all of us
 “ countenance, and be of party with the well deserving;
 “ and the poor we can all of us help by our counsel,
 “ favour, good looks and good words. There is no
 “ commandment of God but all persons may earn
 “ the recompence that belongs to it; for all of us can
 “ perform it either in act, or by approving, applaud-
 “ ing and favouring it. I make the deed of this
 “ Samaritan, nay, all the best deeds of all other public
 “ spirited, well-disposed men to be mine, if wanting
 “ their wealth or their opportunities, I esteem the
 “ persons for their actions, the men for what they do,

lent of the earth, and such he hoped would be his companions through eternity.

How rational, and at the same time how noble and exalted, are the views and prospects of a sincere christian! If it be

“or have done. The first beginnings of excellent
“virtue of whatsoever kind, are usually in our appro-
“bation of these kind of actions.

“3d. Not the Levite, not the Priest, says our
“Saviour have, but the Samaritan, the doer of good,
“is that neighbour whom by God’s law thou art to
“love as thyself. It is true the Samaritan is of
“another religion, he is so overseen as not to own
“some books that are genuine parts of Holy
“Scripture: nay he has great mistakes about the very
“object of worship, about the very person of God;
“his conceptions of God are so confused and uncer-
“tain, that he worships he knows not well what.
“For all that I say to thee, seeing he is an useful man,
“full of good works, thou art to love him as thyself,
“his strange country or his mistaken religion not-
“withstanding. But here what say some men? what,
“embrace a Samaritan, a heretic, a man of false
“religion? we have learned better things, and that
“from Holy Scripture, from the Word of God itself.
“*A man that is an heretic after the first and second*
“*admonition reject*, Tit. iii. 10. that is, cast him off,
“have nothing to do with him, avoid him as a pest.
“It is too common among the contending parties of
“christians, to take scripture words and names, and
“having put them on the wrong person or subject,
“to conclude presently, we have confused and
“shamed

be indeed possible for two or three in an age, after having imbibed the celebrated Mr. Hume's principles, to quit the world like their master. If this might happen to be the case in a few, a very few instances, where, owing to moderate passions,

“shamed them. A heretic, says the Apostle, reject him, cast him off. Right! But then let us mean what heretic he means. He means factious persons, whether they be of a right or of a wrong opinion in religion. To say it in few words, heresy is bigotry, or faction; and heretic is a bigot, a factious or turbulent person, whether such person happens to be right or wrong in his opinions. *Hæreses sunt placita vehementias defensa*, says a most learned critic: heresy is any opinion, whether in philosophy, religion, or politics, for which men contend too earnestly and fiercely. It is not then the truth or falsehood of any opinion that makes it to be heresy, and the person that holds it a heretic, it is the stir, clamour, and bustle made about it by any, that makes the opinion heresy, and the man a heretic: concerning such men the Apostle directs well, *reject them* after having admonished them once and again of their dangerous warmth, avoid them, have no more to do with them. But as for others who are mistaken, that is, we think they are mistaken in their doctrines, the charge concerning them is not to reject them or avoid them. On the contrary, we are cautioned not to judge them, not to condemn them; and for this reason, because they erring conscientiously, God receives them, God accepts them, God will uphold them. Rom. xiv. 4. In short,

H 2

“they

fions, or few temptations, no atrocious acts have been committed to alarm the conscience in a dying hour; supposing that such an one, not having formed the dear and tender connections of a husband and a father, might be able to quit life with a calm indifference; yet as we are all liable to be drawn aside so as to commit vices injurious to our own peace and the good order of society, must not the restraints of religion be very useful? if an affectionate wife, a venerable parent, or a train of little helpless innocents, over whom his heart yearns with the fondest affection, attend the bed of an expiring mortal; if such weep over his languishing body, and with all the eloquence of

a/ “ they say a heretic is to be rejected. I answer yes,
 “ every bigot, every turbulent person, every fire-
 “ brand, of whatsoever sect or persuasion. But for
 “ heretics that are commonly so miscalled, that is,
 “ persons erring in doctrine, it will but ill become us
 “ to reject them when the Holy Scriptures assure us in
 “ express terms that God accepts them.” These ob-
 servations were much more just and liberal, than they
 were common at the time of their being delivered; and
 though it is to be hoped that a much better spirit pre-
 vails now, yet lessons of charity and moderation can
 hardly be too often inculcated. This may excuse the
 length of the quotation, which is but an abridgement of
 the preacher’s arguments.

grief,

grief, bemoan his approaching end, can he *calmly* consign them over to fate and chance, and no one knows what, or cheerfully welcome the approach of death, which will carry him he knows not whither ?

Oh Scepticism ! poor and feeble must be thy aid in such circumstances, unless thy disciple have a heart of stone ! But Christianity affords the most noble consolations at all seasons. The believer is persuaded, that, though he leaves a helpless offspring, the Father of the universe will be their friend ; and as to himself, he hath a good hope, that pleasures are in store for him much more sublime and noble than this world can afford. In heaven the good are assured not only of an eternal exemption from pain and sorrow, but likewise of the fruition of every thing, which can administer joy to their souls. As to the pleasures of society and friendship they will undoubtedly enjoy them in a most exalted degree. All the children of God will then make but one family ; the pious and good (and amongst these may be reckoned the most accomplished and learned of every age and of every

every country) will meet together in those blest abodes.

Renowned warriors, who have fought, not as ambition, but as the duty they owed to their country and to mankind prompted them, will with satisfaction review, and with pleasure recount their exploits; philosophers, who studied the works of creation, with a desire of manifesting the divine wisdom, will be able to unfold all the secrets of nature; and perhaps be conveyed (if they wish it) as quick as thought from star to star, and from world to world.

Poets, who have devoted their talents to serve the interests of virtue, will there tune the praises of the Most High on immortal lyres; and the ministers and friends of religion, who have sincerely endeavoured to promote justice, purity, benevolence and love, will there, with one heart and with one soul, join in those ascriptions of praise which are so justly due; *To the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, the only Wise God; and to Jesus the Prince of the Kings of the Earth, who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood.*

Such

Such are the reflections, which naturally arise to the mind on contemplating the several parts of his conduct, whose life is the subject of this book. Happy will he be, who has attempted to set before mankind so shining a pattern of disinterested benevolence, and to revive the memory of one, in whom were united, to such a remarkable degree, the most amiable and useful qualities, which can adorn humanity, if but one person be wrought upon to aspire after an imitation of those various excellencies, which joined in forming the character of

MR. THOMAS FIRMIN.

THE END.

Edinburgh 1810

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